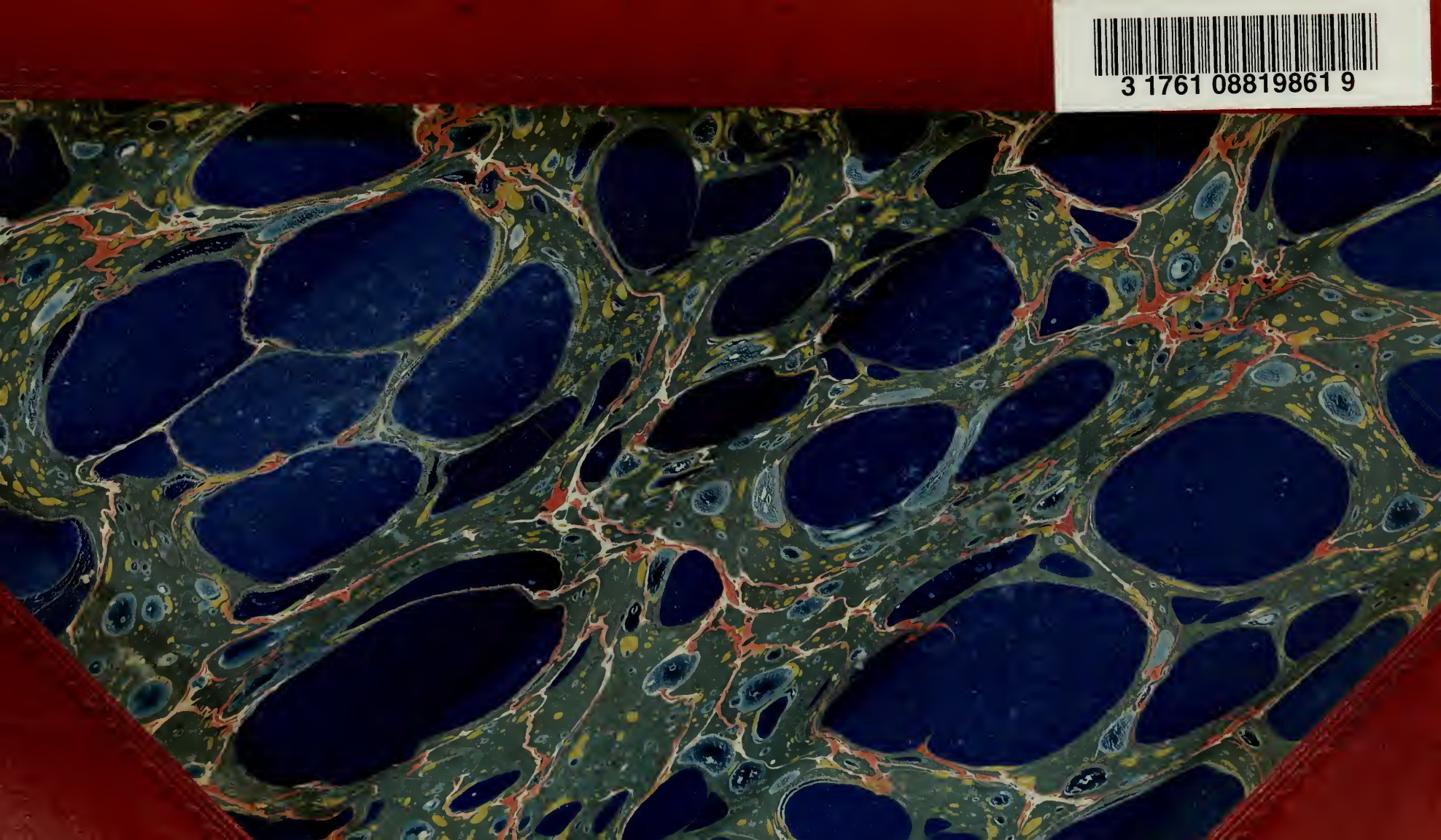
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M. ELLEN STAPLES. R. TAYLOR.

"AND WHAT DID YOU SEE?" GROANED LUCY. "SPEAK UP. I INSIST UPON KNOWING."

"Laden with Golden Grain."

THE

ARGOSY.

EDITED BY

CHARLES W. WOOD.

VOLUME L.

July to December, 1890.

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"And what did you see?" groaned Lucy. "Speak up. I insist upon knowing!"

"Must it go on with us for ever?"

"Oh, Emma," implored Annie, in deep agitation, "tell the truth. You know it cannot be hidden always."

Hester's attention was attracted by a young man not far behind, whose gaze was fixed upon the wedding party with an intensity remarkable to behold.

"I have been avowing to your aunt how matters stand," he said.

"And shall you come again—other nights?"

Illustrations to "Fair Normandy."

THE ARGOSY.

JULY, 1890.

THE HOUSE OF HALLIWELL.

BY MRS. HENRY WOOD, AUTHOR OF "EAST LYNNE."

CHAPTER XVII.

AFTER MANY YEARS.

WE left Hester going up the stairs to her bedroom at eleven o'clock at night, her work in one hand and her candle in the other, when Mrs. Archer suddenly rushed out upon the landing.

"Oh! Miss Halliwell, where's Sarah?" she exclaimed, in nervous excitement. "In mercy let her run for a doctor."

"What is the matter?" asked Hester. "Who is ill?"

"Oh, come and see! It is of no use attempting concealment now." And seizing Hester's arm, she hurried her through the drawing-room. Miss Graves was getting up from the sofa, where she had retired to rest, and Hester put down her work, and went, with her candle, into the bedroom. On the bed, his head raised high upon a pillow, lay a gentleman, his eyes closed and his face still and white, whilst drops of blood were slowly issuing from his mouth.

"Is he dead?" uttered Hester, in the first shock of surprise.

"Where's Sarah? where's Sarah?" was all the answer of Mrs. Archer. "We *must* have a doctor."

"Sarah is in bed. I will go up and call her."

"In bed! then I'll go for one myself." And, throwing on a shawl and bonnet, Mrs. Archer darted down the stairs, but stopped ere she reached the bottom, and looked up at Hester, who was lighting her "The nearest surgeon—where?"

"About ten doors higher up the road. You'll see the lamp over the door."

"Ah, yes, I forgot;" and she flew on. Hester followed, for she remembered that the key of the gate was hanging up in the kitchen, and Mrs. Archer could not get out without it. Then she called up Sarah, and went back to the room.

"Who is this gentleman?" she whispered to Miss Graves.

"Mr. Archer, my sister's husband," was the reply; and, just then, the invalid opened his eyes and looked at them.

Never will Hester forget that moment. The expression of those eyes flashed on the chords of her memory like a ray of light, and gradually she recognised the features, though they were altered, worn, and wasted. Archer? Archer? Yes, although the name had never struck her before as in connection with *him*, there could be no doubt about it. She was gazing on him who had been so dear to her in early life—too dear, for the ending that came.

"He is a clergyman—the Reverend George Archer?" she whispered to Miss Graves.

"Yes. How did you know?"

Poor Hester did not answer. Those old days were coming back to her, as in a dream. The happy home at Seaford, their engagement, the few weeks of transient bliss that followed, the bright vision of the Lady Georgina, and then the wretched parting. And now thus to meet him! Lying on a bed in her own house, and not long for this world!

His wife returned with the doctor. He said the case was not so serious as it appeared. That the blood came from a small vessel ruptured on the chest, not the lungs. Hester remained with Mrs. Archer that night. Sarah made a fire in the drawing-room, and they sat by it while he dozed. Mrs. Archer spoke of her troubles, and sobbed bitterly.

"Has he been long here?" inquired Hester, wondering how in the world he had got in.

"It was the day your pupils were going away," replied Mrs. Archer. "I was standing at the window, watching the carriage which had come to fetch some of them, when I saw my husband coming down the road, evidently looking out for the house. He appeared ill and thin, walked as if his strength were gone, but I knew him, and flew down to the gate, which was open as well as the house-door. As it happened, no one was in the hall when we came upstairs; I heard Sarah's voice on the upper flight; she was bringing down luggage, but she did not see us."

"But you ought to have told me," urged Hester.

"I know that," she rejoined; "and such a thing as taking him in, clandestinely, never entered my thoughts. It arose with circumstances. Look at our position: you positively refused to receive a gentleman here; but he had come, and how were we to remove to other lodgings, owing you what we do, destitute of means, almost destitute of food? So there he lay, ill, on that bed. Reproach me as much as you will, Miss Halliwell; turn us into the road, if you must do so: it seems that little can add to my trouble and perplexity now. There have been moments lately when I have not known how to refrain from—from—running away—and——"

"And what?" asked Hester.

"Why, I have thought the calm bed of a river would be to me as rest after toil."

"Goodness me, Mrs. Archer!" uttered Hester, half in surprise, half in a shock of indignation; "a Christian must never use such language as that, while there's a Heaven to supplicate for refuge. All who ask for strength *to bear*, find it there."

"I have had no happiness in my married life," she went on to say. "It is—let me see—six years since, now. Mr. Archer was a working curate in London: a weary life he led of it in that large parish of poor people. Soon after we married his health began to fail; he used to seem dispirited, and the duties were too heavy for him. I took it into my head that some sorrow was upon him; that he had never really loved me. I don't know. Once I taxed him with it, with both, but he seemed surprised, said he thought he had been always kind, as indeed he had, and I let the idea drop. His health grew worse, change of scene and air were essential to him, and he received an appointment as foreign chaplain—army chaplain I think it was—and went out with that Spanish Legion. Later, I and my sister lost our money. My brother, with whom it was placed, failed, and we were deprived of our income. Latterly we have been living by—it is of no use to mince the matter—by pledging things, and now my husband has come home without his pay, and cannot get the arrears which are due to him. He says they have all been put off, officers and soldiers—not one of them has received a farthing. The Spanish government ought to be prosecuted."

There was a pretty state of things! That sick clergyman in the house, and all three of them without means. Lucy was up in arms when told the news.

"They must go out of the house; they must, Hester; even if we pay for lodgings for them. If he dies, and has to be buried from here, it will be the ruin of the school. Dear—dear! to think of its being George Archer! How things do come about in this world!"

Mrs. Archer wrote to her brother, doubting, however, his ability to assist them, but at the end of a week there came a ten-pound note. Mr. Archer was better then.

"Now I will not take any of it," Hester said to Mrs. Archer. "You shall keep it to start afresh with in new lodgings, but you must leave these."

That same afternoon, Mrs. Archer and her sister went out to seek some, and Hester, according to their request, took her work and went to sit with Mr. Archer.

He was sitting up in the easy-chair, the one which had been Mrs. Halliwell's, and the Major's before her. Many a time had she sat in it when talking to George Archer in the old days. A queerish sort of feeling came over Hester as she took her place opposite to him, for it was the first time they had been alone together; but she made herself busy with her sewing.

They conversed on indifferent subjects—the weather, his medicine, and so on; when all at once he wheeled that chair closer to Hester's, and spoke in low, deep tones:

"Hester, have you ever forgiven me?"

"Indeed yes; long ago."

"Then it is more than I have done by myself," he groaned. 'But I was rightly served."

Hester looked up at him, and then down at her work again.

"You heard, perhaps, how she jilted me. Hester, as true as that you are sitting there, working, she drew me on; drew me on from the first, to flirt with and admire her!"

"You are speaking of ——" Hester could not bring out the word.

"*Her*. Lady Georgina. Who else? And when she saw, as I know she did see, to what a passionate height my love was reaching, she fooled me more and more. I did not see my folly at the time; I was too infatuated to do so; but I have cursed it ever since, as I daresay you have."

"Hush! hush!" interrupted Hester.

"And when it was betrayed to the Earl, and he drove me away, to part with me as she did, without a sigh, without a regret," he went on, not deigning to notice the interruption. "Hester, you were *well* avenged."

"Do not excite yourself, Mr. Archer."

"How I got over those first few weeks I don't know, and shudder to remember. Then came her marriage: I read it in the papers. Heartless, wicked girl! And she had solemnly protested to me she did not care for Mr. Caudour. Well! troubles and mad grief do come to an end; and so, thank God! does life."

"What was your career afterwards?"

"My career for a time was perfect idleness. I could do nothing. Remorse for my wild infatuation had taken heavy hold upon me, and a great amount of misery was mixed up with it. Then, when I came to myself a little, I sought employment, and obtained the curacy of a parish in London, where the pay was little and the work incessant. Next, I married: not with the feelings I should have married *you*, Hester, even then: but the lady had money, a good income, and I had need of many luxuries, for my health was failing—or necessities, call them which you will—which my stipend would not obtain. I grew worse. I think, if I had remained in London, I should have died there, and I went out to Spain."

"From whence you have now returned?"

"Yes. Penniless. Done out of the money coming to me. And now the sooner I die the better, for I am only a burden to others. I am closing a life rendered useless by my own infatuated folly: my talents have been buried in a napkin, my heart turned to gall and wormwood. Oh, Hester! again I say it, you are richly avenged."

"Have you ever met since?"

"Georgina Seaford? Never. Her husband is Lord Caudour now. I saw the old baron's death in a stray newspaper that came out to Spain."

"I have always felt thankful for one thing," said Hester: "that she did not know of our engagement. And perhaps that may offer some slight excuse for her conduct."

"She did know of it," said Mr. Archer, quickly.

Hester looked up, pained and surprised, but still in doubt. "How could she have known of it?" she breathed.

"From me. Oh, yes, I was infatuated all through the piece, and I told her that. I also told her when it was broken off. Don't execrate me, Hester. I have done nothing but execrate myself ever since. Excuse for her conduct there was none: she was a vain, heartless girl."

Hester fell into a reverie, from which she was awakened by hearing the garden gate open, and she looked from the window. "Here come your wife and Miss Graves," she said. "How soon they are in again!"

"Hester," he murmured, in an impassioned tone, seizing her hand as she was about to pass him, intending to open the drawing-room door to welcome them, for in all the little courtesies of life Hester, like her mother, was prompt, "say you forgive me."

She leaned down, and spoke soothingly. "George, believe me, I have perfectly forgiven you: I forgave you long ago. That the trial to me was one of length and bitterness it would be affectation to deny, but I have outlived it. Let me go. They are coming up the stairs."

He pressed her hand between both of his, and then kissed it as fervently as he had kissed her own lips that night, years, years before, when they were walking home, after church, behind her mother and Lucy. She drew it hastily from him, for they were already in the drawing-room, and a feeling, long buried, very like that forgotten *love*, cast a momentary sunshine on her heart: and then she laughed at herself for being a great simpleton.

They had found lodgings and they all moved into them the following day. Hester could not but feel relieved when they had left the house.

It happened the following spring, it was in May, Hester had business at the house of one of their pupils, whose father lived in Upper Brook Street. When close to it she found herself in the midst of a string of carriages, inside which were ladies in full evening dress, though it was only one o'clock in the day. Full of surprise, she asked a policeman what it meant.

"The Queen's drawing-room."

To be sure. She wondered, then, she had not thought of it for herself. It happened to be the first time she had ever seen the sight, and she stood gazing at the rich dresses, the snow-white feathers, and

the lovely, lovely faces. The carriages had been stationary, but now there was a move, and then they were stationary again. More beautiful than any gone before was the inmate of the chariot now opposite to Hester—a fair, elegant woman, with a bright smile and haughty eye. Surely she knew the features! She did, alas for her! Though she had never seen them since they stepped, with their sinful fascinations, between her and her betrothed husband, Hester felt sure that they were those of Georgina Seaford.

"Do you know who this lady is?" she whispered to her friend, the policeman.

He looked at the lady, at the coronet on the carriage, at the white coats and crimson velvet breeches of the servants. "I think," he answered, "it is the Lady Caudour."

Time had passed lightly over her: her countenance was as smooth, as smiling, as free from care as it had been in her girlhood. Hester was struggling through life with a lonely heart, and *he* was dying in his obscure lodgings, after a short career of regret and sorrow; whilst she who had caused all, who had sacrificed them both to her selfish vanity, seemed to be revelling in all the good that could make existence happy.

In her deep and bitter thoughts, Hester had unconsciously fixed her gaze too long and earnestly on that lovely face. It attracted the attention of Lady Caudour, and she returned it. A recollection seemed to flash across her, and she leaned towards Hester and spoke. The chariot was close to the pavement, the policeman had moved on, and not a single spectator had halted just at that spot.

"I think I have some remembrance of your countenance," she said, in a distant, aristocratic, but essentially civil tone. "You are —or were—Miss Halliwell."

The colour flushed over Hester's face; she was "taken to," as the saying runs. She bowed in reply.

"You used to come to the castle at Seaford to teach my sister, Lady Ellen."

"I hope Lady Ellen is well," stammered Hester, feeling as awkward as she did the first day she ever went there, and not knowing what to say.

"Quite well. She will soon be no longer Lady Ellen Seaford; she marries the Earl of Thetford at the close of the season. Are you Miss Halliwell still, may I ask?"

"Still Miss Halliwell."

The carriage moved on a step, and Hester, in her sense of politeness, moved on with it.

"Are you still at Seaford? Who is the rector there now?"

"Not Mr. Archer," returned Hester, wondering what courage prompted her to say it. "But we are no longer living at Seaford."

"Mr. Archer"—in the most perfectly indifferent tone—"I did not know he was ever appointed there."

"I said he was not, madam," was Hester's rejoinder. "He marred his own prospects in early life—or they were marred for him—and he is now dying. Dying, my Lady Caudour, in want and obscurity."

"How very sad!" was Lady Caudour's reply, delivered with high-bred indifference. "I am sorry for him. Is Mrs. Halliwell alive still?"

Before Hester could reply the carriage advanced again, and the Lady Caudour bowed her stately head by way of farewell, not waiting for the answer. Hester looked after her—at the bedizened servants, the luxurious carriage, the magnificent dress and jewels of its mistress, at her careless ease, her conscious vanity as of old, at all the signs of wealth and luxury, of the pomp and pride of life. Her heart was very sad just then. "Oh, Father! Father!" she wailed forth in the anguish of the retrospect pressing sharply upon her: "Thy blessings appear to be dealt out with an unequal hand. Nevertheless, may we be enabled ever to say, Thy will be done; for Thy ways are not as our ways, and Thou knowest what is best for us!"

The Archers did not get on very well. Hester often sent them a substantial plate of something, under pretence of tempting his appetite; slices of roast beef, or a tureen of nourishing broth with the meat in. Lucy would say they could not afford it, and Sarah exclaimed loudly against "cooking for other people;" but they were fellow-creatures, and in need, *and he was George Archer!* That summer put an end to his weary life.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE SCHOOL AND THE HANDKERCHIEFS.

JUST about this time a piece of good fortune befel Mrs. Goring. Her godmother, from whom she had never had the slightest expectations, died, and left her an annuity of £300 for her life. It was, however, to cease then. Dr. Goring was getting on famously, was much liked in Middlebury, and Mary was very happy.

Hester had used to say that no one need envy her, or any other schoolmistress. What with the wearing labour of instructing so many hours daily, the din of the school-room, the crosses and vexations sure to arise with the pupils or their parents, and the worry sometimes caused by the teachers, it was anything but an easy life. A troublesome event arose with one of their teachers, a Miss Powis. But, with the reader's permission, it may be as well to give the account of it in Hester's own words. I am sure she can relate it a great deal better than I can. Therefore, for the next few pages, please to note that it is Miss Halliwell speaking: not the author.

Miss Powis was recommended to us as being particularly likely to

suit. A younger sister of hers was at our school as day-scholar, the parents living near in a small cottage. They had moved in a very respectable sphere of life, but had been unfortunate, and the father had obtained some employment in the City, to and from which he walked morning and evening. Miss Powis was about two-and-twenty, an accomplished, handsome girl, but somewhat wild and random; leading the pupils into mischief, instead of keeping them out of it. Though I cannot but say I liked her, for she had a kind heart, and was ever ready to do a good turn for anyone.

The second half-year she was with us, soon after the re-assembling of the pupils subsequent to the midsummer vacation, the fair took place as usual. It was a great nuisance, this fair, every summer, the noise of the drums and fifes of the show-people reaching even into our school-room, to our annoyance and the school's delight, obliging us to sit with the windows closed. No good was ever done whilst that fair lasted; lessons were not learnt, and copies were blotted; the children's attention being all given to those sounds in the fields at the back.

Well, it was one evening at fair time: Lucy had gone to bed with a sick headache, and a lady unexpectedly dropped in to tea, having come down by one of the city omnibuses. Of course I could not go out and leave her, so I was obliged to send Miss Powis alone with the children for their evening walk. "Go up the Plover Road, opposite," I said to her, when they were ready, "as far as Ringfence field, which will be a quiet, pleasant, rural walk; but be sure don't go within sight or hearing of that disreputable fair."

"Oh, no," she replied, "not for the world;" and away they filed out at the gate.

Now what did that Miss Powis do? As soon as they were beyond view of the house, she turned round—for she was walking first, in her place, mine and Lucy's being at the rear—and said, coming to a standstill: "Girls, suppose we go down Dogfight Lane" (a narrow place, leading to the fair: dirty cottages on one side, trees and a ditch on the other) "just a little way, and have a peep, from the distance, at the pictures outside the shows? Can you all undertake to keep the secret, indoors? I'm sure there's no harm looking at shows half a mile off: and in that Plover Road we shan't see a soul but the old cow in Ringfence field, and our own shadows." Of course the schoolgirls would not have been schoolgirls had they said "No" to any mischief where a teacher led, and they went half frantic with delight, vowing, one and all, that the tortures of the Inquisition should not wring the secret from them—the said tortures having been the subject of their morning's theme.

Half way down Dogfight Lane, they came in view of the still-distant shows, and could have halted there and admired the painted scenes. But this did not satisfy them—one bite out of an apple rarely does, anyone—and on they went, down the lane, and burs

right into the confusion of the fair. They visited the selling-stalls first, where some bought gingerbread; some unripe plums and rotten cherries; some—how humiliated I felt when I heard of it! —raffled for cakes, and shot at pincushions; some drank bottles of trash and fizz, called ginger-beer; and some bought fortune-telling cards; indeed, it is impossible to say what they did not buy. Then they went round to the shows to gaze at the pictures. Ugly booths decorated with play-acting scenery; dandy men in tight-fitting white garments, with red-paint eyebrows; harlequins turning summersaults, and laughing at their own coarse jokes; young women, in a meretricious costume of glazed calico and spangles, reaching no lower than their knees, who walked about with their arms a-kimbo, and waltzed with the harlequins! That a ladies' boarding-school should have been seen in front of anything so low-lived and demoralising!

It was seven o'clock, and the performances were about to commence, drums were beating, fifes were piping, the companies were dancing, and the cries "Walk-up, ladies and gentlemen, we are just going to begin," were echoing above the din. The young ladies stood looking on at all this, longing to see further; for if the outside was so attractive, what must the inside be? And—well, I must not reflect too harshly upon them: it is hard, especially for the young and light-hearted, to resist temptation. They went in—they really did: some into the "wax-work," and the rest into this theatre affair where the harlequins were. When they came to club their money together, it was found to be deficient, but the showmen took them for what they could muster. Very considerate of them! All particulars came out to me afterwards—or how could I have related this?—and I was ready to go out of my mind with vexation. But it was not their fault, it was Miss Powis's; and I have scarcely, I fear, excused her in my heart for her imprudence that night. But I do believe there is no act of deliberate disobedience but brings its own punishment, sooner or later. I have remarked it many times in the course of my life; and this did, with her.

Meanwhile, when my visitor departed, and I had been upstairs to see if Lucy wanted anything, I sat on at the parlour window, beginning to think the young ladies late, but concluding that the beauty of the summer's night made them linger, when Sarah came in, and said Mrs. Nash wanted me.

Mrs. Nash was the lodger now. A lady had taken the apartments after the departure of the Archers, and had remained five months with us, and now Mrs. Nash had succeeded her. She was a very grand lady in purse and dress. Her husband had made a mint of money at something in London, a retail shop we heard, but lately he had given it up, and bought mines, and they had recently taken a villa in our neighbourhood. Mr. Nash was in Cornwall, and his wife had engaged our drawing-room and bedroom for a month, that

she might be on the spot to superintend the fitting-up of her new house. She was certainly very far removed from a gentlewoman, and spoke very ungrammatically. So I went upstairs when Sarah said Mrs. Nash wanted to see me.

"Have the goodness to shut the door behind you," she said, when I entered, without rising from her own seat, which I thought not very polite. She always spoke as if we were her inferiors, though, in birth and education—but that has nothing to do with the matter just now.

"I thought you might have liked the door open this warm evening," I civilly answered, turning back to close it.

"So I might, for it's close enough in this room," she rejoined. "But I've something to say that I don't want all the world to hear. Won't you sit down?"

I drew a chair forward, and sat down near her, waiting for her to continue.

"That servant of yours," she abruptly began—"I want to ask a few questions about her. Is she honest?"

"Honest? Sarah?" For I was too much surprised to say more.

"The question's plain enough," repeated Mrs. Nash, in an impatient tone. "Have you never had no cause to doubt her honesty?"

"She is as honest as the day," I replied warmly. "She has been with us two years, and is above suspicion. I could trust the girl with untold gold."

"It's very odd," continued Mrs. Nash. "It was this day week—this is Friday, isn't it?—I came in from the Willa, tired to death; for I had been standing over them painters and paperers, and telling 'em a bit of my mind about their laziness. I was as hungry as a hunter, besides, and after I had took off my things, I went down to the kitchen to see if Sarah was getting forward with my dinner. She had the steak on the fire, and I went up and looked at the potatoes, for fear she should be doing 'em too much, for young ones is good for nothing when they are soft. That I had my pocket-handkerchief in my hand then I'll swear to, for I lifted the lid of the saucepan with it, and Sarah saw me, but when I got back to the drawing-room here, it was gone."

"You may have put it on the kitchen table and forgotten it," I replied.

"That's just my own opinion, that I did leave it there. I came straight upstairs, and as I was coming in at this door, I put my hand in my pocket for my handkerchief, for the current of air had made me sneeze, but no handkerchief was there. That teacher of yours was standing here, waiting for me: you had sent her up with a book. But she couldn't have touched it."

"Miss Powis? Oh, dear, no."

"Don't I say she couldn't? She was at the end there, by the

window, and I missed my handkerchief coming in at the door. I took the book from her, and she went down, and I after her."

"Did you go back to the kitchen? Did you ask Sarah?" I inquired.

"I went back at once, I tell you, following on Miss Powis's steps, and of course I asked Sarah; and what first raised my suspicions against her was her saying she saw me put the handkerchief in my pocket as I left the kitchen. Now this could not have been the case, for if I had put it in my pocket at the bottom of the stairs, there it would have been when I got to the top, as I told her, but she was as obstinate as a mule over it, and persisted, to my face, that I had put it in."

"I hope you will find it," I said. "It cannot be lost."

"I sha'n't find it now," she answered. "But it was a new handkerchief of fine cambric. I gave a great deal for it."

"Could you have intended to put it in your pocket, and let it slip beside, on to the ground?" I suggested.

"I don't let things slip beside my pocket," she tartly answered; "but, if I had, there it would have been, in the hall or on the stairs. Nobody had been there to pick it up in that minute, and both your teacher and myself can certify that it was not there. No! that servant has it."

"Indeed she has not, Mrs. Nash; I will be answerable for her. But why did you not tell me this at the time?"

"The notion came into my mind that I'd make no fuss, but lay a trap for Sarah. So I have left handkerchiefs about these rooms since, and other things. I put a brooch in a corner of the floor on Monday, and last night I clapped a sixpence under the hearth-rug, knowing she took it up every morning to shake."

"And the results," I cried, feeling that I should blush to lay such "traps" for anyone.

"I like my rights," responded Mrs. Nash, "and nobody will stand up in defence of their own stouter than I will; but to accuse a person without reason, isn't in my nature. So I am free to confess that the baits I have laid about have been left untouched. The girl found and brought me the brooch, saying she supposed it had fallen from my dress; and this morning the sixpence was laid on the mantelpiece."

"Yes, Sarah is strictly honest," I affirmed, "and wherever the handkerchief can have gone, she has not got it. Will you allow me to mention it to her?"

"Oh, yes, if you like. And I'm sure, if between you my property can be brought to light, I shall be glad, and rejoice over it."

"Fidgety, pompous old cat," uttered Sarah, irreverently, when I went down and spoke to her. "She put the handkerchief into her pocket as she left the kitchen; I saw her a-cramming of it in with these two blessed eyes. She's been and mislaid it somewhere; in

her bedroom, I'll be bound, for the things lie about there at sixes and sevens. She'll find it, ma'am, when she's not looking for it, never fear."

"Sarah, what in the world can have become of the young ladies?"

"The young ladies!" echoed Sarah, "aren't they come in?" For the girl had been on an errand for Mrs. Nash, and did not know to the contrary.

"Indeed they are not."

"I'm sure I thought nothing but what they were in, and in bed. Why, ma'am, it's twenty minutes past nine!"

"Where can they be? What is Miss Powis thinking about?"

"There's that noise again!" uttered Sarah, banging down her kitchen window as the sound of the drums and trumpets broke suddenly from the fair. "They are letting the folks out of the shows."

"Now! This is early to give over."

"Give over! Law bless you, ma'am! There's another repetition of the performance about to begin now: them tambourines and horns is to 'tice folks up. It won't be over till just upon eleven o'clock; as you'd know if you slept back."

It may have been ten minutes after that when we heard the side door open stealthily, and the young ladies come creeping in. I sprang towards them.

"What has been the matter? Where have you been?" I reiterated.

"We missed our way, and walked too far," answered a voice from amongst them, though whose it was I did not recognise then, and no one will own to it since.

"Very careless indeed, Miss Powis," I uttered; "very wrong. The young ladies must be tired to death, walking all this time, especially the little ones."

No one gave me any reply, and they all made for the staircase and bounded up it, Miss Powis after them, certainly not as if they were tired, more as if they wanted to get out of my sight. Young legs are indeed elastic, I thought to myself, little dreaming that those samé legs had been at rest for the last two or three hours, the knees cramped between hard benches, and the feet buried in sawdust.

Several days passed on, and nothing occurred to arouse my suspicions about this fair escapade. On the Wednesday afternoon, our half-holiday, Mrs. Nash, in a fit of condescension, sent down an invitation for me, my sister, and Miss Powis to drink tea with her. As we could not all leave the young ladies, and we thought it might appear selfish if we went up ourselves and excluded Miss Powis (though she knew nothing of the invitation), Lucy said she would be the one to remain with the children.

A very good cup of tea she gave us, and Mrs. Nash entertained us with visions of her future greatness. The handsome fittings-up

of her new villa, the servants they intended to keep, the new open carriage about to be purchased, and the extensive wardrobe she both had and meant to have. "What do you think I gave for this?" she said, suddenly holding out her pocket-handkerchief. "Isn't it lovely, and I've a dozen of them."

"It is indeed a beautiful handkerchief," I said, examining its fine embroidery, and its trimming of broad Valenciennes lace. "It is unfit for common use."

"Yes, it is," answered Mrs. Nash. "But I used it at the horter-culteral show yesterday, so thought I'd finish it up to-day. I gave eight-and-twenty shilling for that, at Swan and Edgar's, without the lace."

After tea, we took out our work. I proceeded to darn a lace collar, which was beginning to drop into holes, and Miss Powis to go on with her bead purse. Mrs. Nash said she could afford to put work out, and never did any. It happened that this collar had belonged to my mother, and we were comparing its lace, which was old point, with the Valenciennes round the handkerchief, when the gate bell rang, and Sarah came up and said a lady wanted me. So I laid my collar on the table, and went down to the parlour.

It was Mrs. Watkinson, who had come to pay the last quarter's bill for her niece's schooling. She sat talking some little time, and when she left I returned upstairs again, meeting on my way Miss Powis, who was running down them

"I have worked up all my beads," she remarked to me in passing, "and am going to fetch some more." Making some trifling answer, I entered the drawing-room. Mrs. Nash was standing at the window, watching two omnibuses which were galloping past.

"How them omnibuses do race, one against another!" she exclaimed. "If I was a magistrate, I'd have every omnibus-driver in London before me, and put 'em into gaol in a body, endangering people's lives as they do! As soon as I have a carriage of my own, I sha'n't want to trouble 'em much, thank the stars."

I stood for a moment by her side, looking at the clouds of dust which the flying omnibuses raised behind them, and Mrs. Nash returned to her seat.

"Where's my handkerchief gone?" she suddenly exclaimed.

I looked round. She was standing by the table, turning about all that was lying upon it, newspapers, my work, Miss Powis's work-box, and other things. No handkerchief was there; and then she looked about the room. "Where can it be?"

"Are you speaking of the handkerchief you had in use?" I asked.

"Yes, I am. It was on the table by me, by your work, I'm sure of that. That makes two gone. What an odd thing."

I quite laughed at her. "It cannot be gone," I said; "it is impossible."

"Well, where is it then? It can't have sunk through the floor."

That was clear. "Perhaps you have left it in the bedroom," I suggested.

"I have not been in the bedroom," returned Mrs. Nash, angrily. "I have never stirred from my seat since tea, till I got up to look at them wicked omnibuses. As I turned from the window I put my hand in my pocket for my handkerchief and couldn't find it; then I remembered I had left it on the table, and I looked, and it wasn't there, and it wasn't on my chair, and it isn't anywhere—as you see, Miss Halliwell. One would say you had fairies in the house."

Just then Miss Powis returned. "What can I have done with my paper of beads?" she exclaimed, going up to her workbox and examining its contents. "Why here they are, after all! How could I have overlooked them?"

"I have lost something worse than beads," interposed Mrs. Nash. "My beautiful handkerchief. It's spirited away somewhere."

Miss Powis laughed. "It was lying on the table for ever so long," she said to Mrs. Nash. "You took it up and pressed it to your mouth, saying one of your lips was sore, and it was probably the salt from the shrimps you had taken at tea. After that, I think you put it in your pocket."

"Are you sure it is not in your pocket now?" I eagerly inquired of Mrs. Nash.

"Goodness save us; do you think I should say I hadn't the handkerchief if I had?" returned Mrs. Nash in a passion. "Look for yourselves." She whipped up her gown as she spoke—a handsome green satin one, which she frequently wore—and displayed a white jean pocket resting on a corded petticoat. Rapidly emptying her pocket of its contents, she turned it inside out.

It certainly was not in her pocket, and she proceeded to shake her petticoats as if she were shaking for a wager. "It's not about me; I wish it was. Do you think either of you ladies can have put it into your pockets by mistake?"

"It is impossible that I can have done so," I answered; "because I was not in the room."

"And equally impossible for me," added Miss Powis; "for I was not on that side of the table, and could only have taken it by purposely reaching over for it." Nevertheless we both, following the example of Mrs. Nash, proceeded to turn out our pockets. No signs of the handkerchief.

A complete hunt ensued. I begged Mrs. Nash to sit still, called up Sarah, and we proceeded to the search. Mrs. Nash's bedroom was also submitted to the ordeal, but she protested that if found there, it must have flown through the keyhole. She offered the keys of her drawers, and of the cupboard—if we liked to look, she said—and was evidently very much put out, and as much puzzled

as we were. Later in the evening, Miss Powis retired to take the children to bed, and Lucy came in.

"Now what is your opinion of this little bit of mystery?" asked Mrs. Nash, looking at me.

"I cannot give one," I said; "I am unable to fathom it. It is to me perfectly unaccountable."

"Your suspicions don't yet point to the thief?"

"The thief! Oh, Mrs. Nash, pray do not distress me by talking in that way. The handkerchief will come to light, it *must* come to light: I assure you Sarah is no thief."

"Oh, I don't suspect Sarah now," returned the lady. "It's a moral impossibility that she could have had anything to do with the business this evening, and I am sorry to have accused her to you before. You are on the wrong scent, Miss Halliwell."

I felt my face flush all over. Did she suspect ME?

"Ah, I see, light is dawning upon you," she added.

"Indeed, indeed it is not," I retorted, warmly. "We have no thief in this house: we never have had one yet."

"Well, you are certainly as unsuspicious as a child," she said. "Who has it—has both—but Miss Powis?"

"Miss Powis!" I and Lucy uttered together. "Impossible!"

"We none of us have it—have we? the room has not got it—has it? it can't have vanished into the earth or soared up to the skies, and I suppose none of us ate it. Then who can have it but Miss Powis? The thing is as plain as a pikestaff. What made her rush out of the room, on a sudden, pretending to go for her beads, when they were here all the while?"

"Miss Powis is quite a gentlewoman; the family are very respectable, only reduced," broke in Lucy, indignantly. "She would be no more capable of it than we should be."

"Oh, bother to family gentility," retorted Mrs. Nash; "that doesn't fill young girls' pockets with pocket-money. I suppose she was hard up, and thought my handkerchiefs would help her to some."

I felt too vexed to speak. Lucy began a warm reply, but was interrupted by Mrs. Nash.

"I should like to know how she disposed of the first: I'll stop her disposing of the last, for I'll have her up before the Lord Mayor to-morrow morning. This comes of her going gallivanting, as she did, to those shows at the fair."

"What a dreadful calumny!" uttered Lucy.

"She didn't only go herself, but she took all the school," coolly persisted Mrs. Nash, "and they never arrived home till half-past nine at night. You two ladies, for school-mistresses, are rather innocent to what's going on around you."

A sharp recollection, bringing its own pain, flashed across me of the night when the young ladies terrified me by remaining out so

late. *Could* they have been to the fair? I was unable to offer a word.

"Have some of the girls in, and ask 'em, if you don't believe me," continued Mrs. Nash. "Not Miss Powis; she'll deny it."

Lucy, full of indignant disbelief, flew upstairs, and brought down some of the elder girls: they had begun to undress, and had to re-apparel themselves again. I addressed them kindly, and begged them to speak the truth fearlessly: Did they go to the shows at the fair, or not?

A dead silence, and then a very long drawn-out "Yes" from a faint voice. Lucy threw her hands up to her face: she was more excitable than I.

"That's right, children," cried Mrs. Nash: "never speak nothing but the truth, and then you'll not get into trouble. And if—goodness save us, they are beginning to cry! Why, you have nothing to be frightened at. There's no great harm in going to shows: I have gone to 'em myself, hundreds of times."

"And what did you see?" groaned Lucy. "Speak up. I insist upon knowing. Everything."

"Lady Jane Grey, in wax-work, going to execution, in a black shroud and Protestant prayer-book; and Henry the Eighth and his six wives, in white veils and silver fringe, one of them with a baby in three ostrich feathers; and the young Queen Victoria being crowned, with her hair let down, and the Archbishop of Canterbury, in a grey mitre and green whiskers, pouring oil on her—no, the mitre was green and the whiskers were grey; and Earl Rochester with a sword and an eye-glass, looking through it at Nell Gwynne; and King William in a pilot-coat, drinking coffee with the Queen Dowager; and Jane Shore in a white sheet, and—oh, dear! we can't recollect all," was the answer Lucy received, with a burst of sobs between every sentence.

"Oh, you unhappy children!" responded Lucy. "And did all of you go into this wax-work?"

"N——o. Some went into the theatre."

"The theatre! What did you see there?"

"A play—very beautiful. About a princess who wanted to marry somebody, and her father wanted her to marry somebody else, and she died right off on the stage for love, amongst the wax-lights."

"Wax-lights!" repeated Mrs. Nash, with a hearty laugh. "Why, you innocents! they were nothing but halfpenny dips. Was there plenty of dancing and singing?"

"Y——es. The dancers were from the Opera in London, they said; stars, condescendingly come there because the season was over." And this made Mrs. Nash laugh again, but Lucy looked all the graver.

"Young ladies," I interposed, "I believe you have told me the

truth : tell me a little more. How came you to go? Who proposed it, or induced you?"

"It was Miss Powis. She took us. Oh, indeed"—with a very genuine burst of sobs—"we should never have gone of ourselves."

"I told you so," cried Mrs. Nash, triumphantly, and Lucy left the room with the children. "I heard of it the next day from one of the workmen at my willa, who was there and saw them. But of course it was no business of mine—till now."

CHAPTER XIX.

BEFORE THE MAGISTRATE.

THE scene in our house the following morning was beyond description. Mrs. Nash called in a policeman, and gave Miss Powis into custody for stealing her two handkerchiefs. The latter, in tears and the extreme of agitation, protested she had never touched either. There was an air of indignant truth about her, impossible, I thought, to be assumed. I am a great reader of countenances and manner, and I have some penetration, and I thought I could have staked my life upon the girl's innocence. The policeman a little disenchanted me. "When you have had the experience we have, ma'am," he said, "you'll let assertions of innocence and aspects of truth go for what they are worth, and that's moonshine." Miss Powis offered the keys of her boxes, and insisted upon their being searched, and that her clothes should be examined. I thought she would have gone out of her senses, so great was her excitement, especially after her father arrived.

"Confess where the property is, and then I'll let you off," said Mrs. Nash, in answer to her impassioned appeals.

"I have not got it. I never had it. I swear it before Heaven."

"Policeman, get a fly. We'll go up to the police-court."

"Be ye merciful, even as your Father which is in Heaven is merciful," broke in the pleading voice of Mr. Powis, a quiet, gentlemanly man, with a sad amount of care in his pale face. "I am sure, madam, my daughter is innocent: subject her not to this dreadful disgrace. The property may yet be found to have been mislaid."

"Moonshine, sir! as that policeman has just said about looks. Where can it have been mislaid to? up the chimney, or into the fire—when there was none in the grate?"

"I beseech you to show a little mercy. Give time. Think what your feelings would be if a child of your own was accused!"

"I never had no child, but one, and that died when it was only a week old," responded Mrs. Nash. "The fact is, sir, when young women have a propensity for dancing off to fair-shows and donkey-racing, it's no wonder if they help themselves to things not their own to pay for it."

"But Caroline has not been to such places!" uttered the astonished Mr. Powis.

"Hasn't she, though! Policeman, what are you standing there for, doing nothing? If you don't choose to get a fly, I'll call in some other officer."

We must have made a strange sight, driving away from our gate and up to London in that fly! Mrs. Nash, myself, Mr. Powis and his daughter inside, the latter sobbing hysterically, and the policeman on the box, beside the driver. Mr. Powis had already offered to pay the value of the handkerchiefs, for which the magistrate, afterwards, accused him of a wish to compound a felony; and I am sure I would have paid it twice over, rather than have had such a scandal emanating from my house. But Mrs. Nash would not listen: she said she did not want the value, she wanted the property.

It appeared to me that the sitting magistrate was a great brute, or else that he was, that morning, in a dreadful temper. He is no longer a magistrate now, at least in this world, so it is of no consequence my recording my opinion. I have no clear recollection of the scene now, and never did have; I was too much bewildered and annoyed. I know that the court appeared to me a Babel of staring eyes and confusion, and I felt thoroughly ashamed of being within it.

"What's your name?" growled the magistrate when the case was called on.

"Caroline Frances Powis, sir," said her father.

"Can't she answer for herself, sir?" was the surly rejoinder. "Ever here before, officer?"

"No, your worship. Not unfavourably known. In fact, not known at all."

I need not give the particulars of the examination, having already mentioned the facts. I know I was called as evidence, and never knew afterwards how I gave it. I daresay the Court thought I was a great simpleton.

"Now, young woman," growled the magistrate, "what have you to say to this?"

She was a great deal too hysterical to say anything; and I must remark that his manner was enough to terrify the most innocent prisoner into an appearance of guilt. The old—I was going to write fool, but I'll put magistrate—committed her for trial. I thought I should have fainted when I heard it. And to have witnessed the graceless crowd assembled there bursting into a titter when it came out that our young ladies had gone to the show-booths on the sly! My cheeks are tingling with the recollection now.

He said he would admit her to bail; and while Mr. Powis went out to get it we were put into a dark, dirty room of the Court—locked in, I daresay. After that—it was a long while—we rode home again, but Mrs. Nash was not with us then. People asked why I remained when the examination was over, but I could not find

in my heart to leave the poor thing alone: I should never have reconciled it to my conscience afterwards.

"She must go to your house, Mr. Powis," I whispered to him as the fly was nearing home; "I may not take her again to mine."

"You do not believe her guilty?" he rejoined.

I was puzzled what to answer. That morning I would have heartily said, No; but the thought had been imperceptibly insinuating itself into my mind, in the atmosphere of that police-court—if she did not take the handkerchiefs, where were they? That going to the fair had its bias on my judgment; it had weighed heavily with the magistrate, *and I saw it was beginning to do so with her father.* Disobedience, as I told you, is sure to bring its own punishment. So she went to her father's home, and we procured another teacher.

Now, it was a strange thing, but some days afterwards Caroline Powis was attacked with measles. Perhaps she caught the disease in the Court; I shall always think so, for we were brought into contact with sundry poverty-stricken, ghastly-looking people, and there was not a single case of it in our neighbourhood. She had never had the disorder, and was extremely ill, the doctor, at one time, giving no hope of her. But she grew better, and when all danger of my carrying the infection back to the school was past, I went to see her. She was lying in bed, looking thin and white, but a hectic flush spread over her cheeks when she saw me.

"I am sorry to see you here, my dear," I said; "I hoped you were up long since."

"I hope I shall never get up again," she eagerly answered; "I do not wish to. All the world believes me guilty."

"Not all the world," I said, soothingly. Poor thing! Whether culpable or not, I was grieved to see her lying there, so lonely and woebegone.

"Yes, they do. My father, my brothers and sisters, even my mother, all believe it now. I am sure you do, Miss Halliwell. They harp so much upon my having gone to the shows, and say if I did the one I might have done the other. I hope I shall never get up from here again. And the thought of the trial terrifies me night and day. It comes over me as a dreadful nightmare, from which I try to escape and cannot, and then I scream with terror."

"That is true," Mrs. Powis said to me when we went downstairs. "If she suddenly wakes up in the night her terror is so great that I have to hasten from my room to soothe her. She asserts that she shall never get up from her bed again, and I do not think she will. The dread of this disgrace, of her standing in public to be tried as a common criminal, seems literally to be killing her by inches. Caroline was always so sensitive."

My recollection is not clear upon one point: whether she ought to have been tried before the long vacation, or whether the trial was originally fixed for after the assembling of the Courts in November. I

think the former, and that it was postponed on account of her illness. At any rate, November came in, and she had not been tried. Oh, those long, weary months to her! Poor girl!

The week of the trial came; it was to be on a Thursday, and on the Monday evening previously Mrs. Powis called at our house. It was quite late, had struck eight o'clock, and Lucy and I were just sitting down to our homely supper. I pressed her to take some. She would not, but accepted a glass of wine.

"Poor Caroline wants to see you, Miss Halliwell," she said to me. "She has been dwelling upon it these many days, but more than ever this afternoon."

"How is she?" I and Lucy eagerly asked.

"I think she is dying," was the answer. "I do not believe she will be alive on Thursday—the day she has so much dreaded. Of course the trial will be put off again, for she could not be moved from her bed to attend it."

The words shocked me greatly, and Lucy let fall her knife upon her cheese-plate, and chipped a piece out of it.

"To tell you the truth," continued poor Mrs. Powis, bursting into tears, "I have held back from asking you to come, but her urgency this evening has been so great, I could refuse no longer. I do so fear," she hesitated, dropping her voice to a whisper, "that she may be going to *confess* to you, as she thinks she is about to die; and to know that she has confessed her guilt would almost kill me. Though her father has been inclined to judge her harshly, I have unconsciously clung with hope to her constant assertions of innocence."

"Do you wish me to come to-night?"

"Oh, no. I had a minute's leisure this evening, and so ran out. Come to-morrow, if that will suit you."

"But to be dying," interposed Lucy; "it seems so strange! What complaint has she? What is she dying of?"

"A galloping consumption, as the doctor says, and as I believe," answered Mrs. Powis. "My father went off in the same way, and my only sister. They were both well, and ill, and dead in two months, and—unlike her—had no grief to oppress them. Caroline might not have lived, even if this unhappy business had never occurred; the measles seemed to take such hold upon her constitution. Then I may tell her you will come, Miss Halliwell?"

"Yes, indeed. I will come as soon as I can, after morning school."

Mrs. Powis left, and I and Lucy sat over the fire, talking. "I would give something," she said, in a musing manner, "to know whether Caroline Powis was really guilty. I fear she was: but if it had not been for that show-going, my belief in it would have been more difficult."

"Lucy, she was certainly guilty. What else could have become of the pocket-handkerchiefs? And her conduct since, this excessive prostration and grief, is scarcely consistent with conscious innocence."

May the angels, who heard that uncharitable opinion of mine, blot out its record! Cause of repentance for having uttered it came to me very shortly, proving how chary we ought to be in condemning others, even when appearances and report are against them. "*Who art thou that presumest to judge another?*"

After twelve the next morning, I put on my bonnet and shawl, and was going out at the door when Lucy ran up, and called to me.

"Hester, you may as well step into the dressmaker's, as you will pass her door," she said. "Ask her whether she means to let us have our new dresses home or not, and when. She has had them nearly a month, and never been to try them on."

Upon what trifling circumstances great events turn!

I went into the dressmaker's on my way. Her assistant and the two apprentices were in the workroom, but not herself.

"Miss Smith won't be two minutes, ma'am," said one of them; "she is only upstairs, trying on a lady's mantle. Or shall we give her any message?"

No, I determined to wait and see her myself, for I had sent her messages without end, and the dresses seemed none the nearer. She was always overwhelmed with work. So I sat down. One of the young women was busy with a green satin dress, unpicking the lining from the skirt. I knew it at once.

"Is not that Mrs. Nash's?" I asked.

"Yes, ma'am," answered the assistant. "She has got the bottom of the skirt jagged out and dirty, so we are going to let it down from the top and take the bad in, and put in a new lining. There's plenty of satin turned in at the top—a good three inches. She says she always has her gowns made so. It's not a bad plan."

Miss Smith came in, and I was talking to her, when the young person who was unpicking the dress suddenly exclaimed: "My patience! what's this?"

We both turned. She was drawing something from between the lining and the satin skirt, and we all pressed round to look. *It was an embroidered handkerchief.*

"As sure as fate it is the one the rumpus was about!" uttered Miss Smith, in excitement; "the one poor Miss Powis was accused of stealing. What a providential coincidence, ma'am, that you stepped in, and were here to witness it!"

"Look if there's another," I said to the young girl; "there were two lost." And she bent down her face, and looked in between the lining and the dress.

"Here's something else," she said. "Yes, sure enough, it is another handkerchief. But this is a plain one."

It was even so. After months of agitation to many, and of more than agitation to Caroline Powis, the two lost handkerchiefs were brought to light in this mysterious manner. It appeared that the

sewing of the pocket-hole, the thread which attached the lining to the satin, had come undone, and when Mrs. Nash had put, as she thought and intended, the handkerchiefs into her pocket, each had slipped down between the lining and the dress. The truth might have been detected earlier, but she had scarcely had the gown on since leaving my house : in its present "jagged" state, it was deemed too shabby for the splendours of the new villa.

When I went out at Miss Smith's door, I stopped and hesitated. Should I go to Caroline Powis, or should I go to Mrs. Nash ? That I would visit both I fully determined on. Better ease *her* mind first.

I was shocked at the alteration in her appearance when I entered her chamber : the attenuated features, their hectic flush, and the wandering eye. She struggled up in bed when she saw me.

"Oh, Miss Halliwell," she eagerly exclaimed, "I thought you were never coming. I am going to die—even the doctor admits that there is no hope. I have wanted to tell you, once again, that I am innocent of that dreadful thing—and you will not think I would utter anything but truth in dying."

"Dear child," I said, "I have news for you. Your innocence is proved to me, to your mother—for I have just told her ; there she stands, sobbing with joy—and it will soon be proved to the whole neighbourhood. The handkerchiefs are found and you are exculpated. Providence, who is ever merciful, has brought the truth to light, in His own mysterious way."

It affected her so much less than I had anticipated ! There was no burst of excitement, no fainting, very little increase of the hectic flush. She sank back upon her pillow and clasped her hands upon her bosom. It may be that she was too near the portals of another world for the joys or sorrows of this one violently to affect her.

"I have had but one prayer since I lay here," she whispered, at length : "that God would make manifest my innocence ; if not before my death, after it. Dear mamma "—holding out her hand—"my father will not be ashamed of me now. And for the going to the shows—that surely may be forgiven me, for I have suffered deeply for it. Tell the truth to all the schoolgirls, Miss Halliwell."

When I went to Mrs. Nash's, which I did at once, that lady was seated in great state in her dining-room, eating her luncheon, for she had taken to fashionable hours now. It was served on an elegant service of Worcester china, and consisted of pork chops and pickles, mashed potatoes, apple-tart and cheese, with wine and ale. She did not invite me to partake of it, which compliment I thought would have been only polite, as there was great abundance. Not that I should have done so. But, in her new grandeur, we schoolmistresses were deemed very far beneath her.

"Well," she said, "have you come about this bothering trial ?

Take a seat; there, by the fire if you like. I hear it is to be put off again."

"Put off for good, I think, Mrs. Nash."

"Put off for good! What do you mean? If the judges think to grant a reprieve or pardon, or whatever it's called, and so squash the affair before it comes on, my husband shall show 'em up in the courts for it. I'll make him. I don't say but what I'm sorry for the girl and her long illness, but then she shouldn't have been obstinate, and refused to confess. I can't help fancying, too, that the illness is part sham, a dodge to escape the trial altogether."

"You talk about her confessing, Mrs. Nash, but suppose she had nothing to confess, that she was really innocent, what else could she have done than deny it?"

"Suppose the world's made of soft soap," broke forth Mrs. Nash, scornfully. "How can you be such a gaby, Miss Halliwell? Why, you are almost as old as I am—oh, yes, you are. Not quite, may be; but when one dies from old age, the other will be quaking. If Caroline Powis did not steal the handkerchiefs, where did they go to, pray? Stuff!"

"They are found," I said.

She was carrying the tumbler of ale to her mouth, for she had continued her meal without heed to my presence, but she stared at me, and put it down untasted.

"The handkerchiefs are found, Mrs. Nash, and I have seen them."

"Where were they? Who found them? Who took them?" she asked, reiterating question upon question. "Has she given them up, thinking I'll let her off from being tried?"

"Do you remember, ma'am, that the day you lost the handkerchiefs you had on your green satin gown? Both days."

"Green satin gown! For all I know, I had. What has that to do with it?"

"They were unpicking the gown this morning at Miss Smith's, and inside the lining ——"

"What are you going to tell me?" screamed Mrs. Nash, as if a foreshadowing of the truth had flashed upon her, whilst she threw down her knife and fork on the table, and pushed her chair away from it. "I declare you quite frighten me, with your satin gowns and your unpicking, and your long, mysterious face. Don't go and say I have accused the girl unjustly!"

"Between the lining and the dress they found the two handkerchiefs," I quietly proceeded. "They must have fallen in there, the hemming of the pocket-hole being unsewn, when you thought you were putting them into your pocket. Sarah persisted, if you remember, that she saw you putting the first in, a few minutes before you missed it."

I never saw such a countenance as hers at that moment. She turned as red as fire, and her mouth gradually opened and

remained so. Presently she started up, speaking in much excitement.

"Come along, Miss Halliwell. I'll go to the dressmaker's, and have this out at once; confirmed or denied. Lawk-a-mercy! what reparation can I make to Caroline Powis?"

There was no reparation to be made. In vain Mrs. Nash sent jellies and blancmanges, and wings of chicken, and fiery port-wine to tempt the invalid back to life; in vain she drove daily up in her own carriage with her own liveried coachman ("such an honour for the like of that little cottage of the Powises!" quoth the neighbours), and sat by Caroline's bedside, and made all sorts of magnificent promises to her, if she would only get well; in vain she sent Mr. Powis's landlord a cheque for the quarter's rent, hearing there was some little difficulty about its payment, for Caroline's illness had been expensive and run away with all the ready money; and in vain she put the youngest child, a boy, rising nine, into the Blue-coat School, through an influential butcher, who was a common councilman and very great in his own ward and her husband's particular friend. Nothing recalled poor Caroline. "But don't grieve," she said to Mrs. Nash on the eve of her departure; "I am going to another and a better world." And she went to it.

Now it is quite possible, and indeed probable, that Caroline Powis would have died whether this disgrace had fallen on her or not, for consumption, very rapid consumption, was hereditary in her family. But the effect the unpleasant circumstances had upon me was lasting, and I made a resolve that if I lost all the pocket-handkerchiefs I possessed in the world, and had not so much as half a one left for use, I would never prosecute anyone for stealing them.

Should any be inclined to question this little episode in my domestic experience, I can only say that it is strictly true, and occurred exactly as I have related it. If Mrs. Nash is indignant with me for telling it, though so many years have since passed, and she still lives close by, I cannot help it, and I am under no obligation to her.

(*To be continued.*)

A DAY IN ANCIENT ROME.

THE ordinary occupations of London might furnish an interesting contrast to the mode of life pursued in Imperial Rome—perhaps two cases of more striking apposition could not be quoted.

The general exodus from suburbs to town which takes place in London at eight or nine every morning, in Rome could have no existence, for Rome possessed no suburbs. The business men who pour in their thousands from pleasant villas in the country into the city were represented in ancient Rome by a class equally numerous—that of slaves. The slaves were the general monopolists of all business labour of a subordinate kind, such as that performed by clerks, managers, foremen and shopmen. They were also the sole representatives of our mechanics, artisans, workmen, and the other performers of menial work. The proprietor of the establishment, whatever it might be, *bought* his *employés* as he might require them, kept them all on the premises, and compelled them to perform their labour not by the ties of duty or the promise of reward, but by the fear of punishment, which might at the master's pleasure be extended even to death.

Let us imagine a state of things existing where, shall we say, a large upholsterer, finding that his carriers were slow in delivering a cart-load of goods, executed them all on their arrival in Tottenham Court Road, and bought half-a-dozen fresh ones to supply their places—let us imagine this, and we shall have an idea of the relation between master and servant in ancient Rome.

The employés in the great business houses and manufactories rose, as may be expected, particularly early; and long before London is awake Rome was astir—at least, in this portion of its community. Sleeping on the premises, they descended or ascended to their labours after a hurried breakfast, and sedulously plied them all day, with short intervals for meals, which were all supplied by the master.

If we enter one of these large workshops or manufactories we shall find it not very different from the appearance which would be presented by a similar place to-day, except only in the absence of machinery, and the natural deficiency in certain trade improvements with which two thousand years have rendered men more familiar.

Let us choose a porcelain factory, and we shall find slaves in scores manipulating the self-same potter's wheel which may be seen in use at Stoke and its environs at the present hour, forming cups, vases, bowls with equal dexterity and, according to ocular evidence, with far greater beauty.

Let us enter a publisher's—for there were publishers in ancient Rome no less than in modern London—and we shall see at early

sunrise rows and rows of tables, capable of accommodating many a thousand slaves, filled with their busy occupants, all with head inclined to their left shoulder, with ink before them, parchment in front of them and pen in hand, producing an edition of some favourite poet or prose writer. The same division of labour prevails as in a printing-office: each copyist has his special portion of "copy" before him, which are afterwards transmitted to the binder to arrange and bring together. The poems of Virgil could be turned out at the rate of one volume in half-an-hour by such vast multitudes of writers.

While the clerks, mechanics and artisans are thus early astir in Rome—rising before dawn and being in the thick of their labours by sunrise—there is another class in the city who are equally early afield. These are the Prætorian Guards, who, with braying trumpets and clashing cymbals, march through the Forum on their way to the Campus Martius for military exercise. Though the hour is still so early, there are plenty of spectators abroad, among the rest school-boys, to stand and stare at their glittering uniforms and listen to the martial din of their instruments.

Schools met early, by which we may fairly judge that the whole household, or at least the female portion of it, rose betimes, in order to prepare breakfast for the juveniles and to see them off for the often distant academy where they received their education. In winter time the boys were provided with lamps when they left home, for winter and summer made no difference in their hours; and for many a long hour they used to stand shivering with cold in the early morning poring over their Horaces or Virgils, and with nothing but the flame of their lamps to warm them.

Early rising, however, was not confined to these classes of the community, being prevalent amongst everyone.

The first meal of the day, the jentaculum, or breakfast, was taken between five and six, and consisted of a little fruit, bread and wine. After this the mature and independent portion of the citizens began to spend their day according to their usual custom.

The business element in Rome was in the hands of a class of citizens who were called the Knights—a term which had descended from ancient times, and had no justification in a military sense at the time we are writing of—the age of Nero or Domitian. Those citizens who were so favoured by fortune or their fathers' industry as to have a lucrative business occupation to attend to, found employment for themselves in superintending their stores or manufactories, and busied themselves there, with a few intervals, all day.

But the majority of Roman citizens bred and born were not so highly favoured by their good genius. Society at large, as we understand the term, was divided into two great classes—clients and patrons, the former depending almost entirely on the latter for support, house-room, and even clothing—depending, that is to say,

not on any legal obligation on the patron's part, but purely on his liberality.

This peculiar relation of Roman citizens to one another had a great influence on the arrangement of the Roman day.

The clients, who comprised about one entire half of the freeborn Romans, found their day mapped out for them despite their reluctance; and directly they rose in the morning their first duty was to run to their patron's house, make inquiries after his health, and if possible obtain entrance at the door for the sake of saluting him. "While yet the Great Bear is turning in the sky," says a Latin poet of the time, "while the cold, raw morning is sending its showers of sleet into the face of the wayfarer, the clients begin their morning calls. So eager are they to be there first, they do not stay to buckle their sandals. And some hang about the porch from the night before, intending to anticipate the others."

What vast concourses of people must have been traversing the streets hither and thither, hanging about the doors of great houses, talking, chattering, laughing, idling!—this was a spectacle unique among all the other capital cities of the world that have since been or that will be.

But still more extraordinary was the second great business of the day among Roman citizens.

The salutation over, they hastened home, and reappeared in a short while with baskets, dishes and tins in their hands, which they carried with unblushing deliberation to the doors of the great houses which they had occupied the early morning in besieging. The well-to-do citizens, who still were not exactly the high nobility, came in palanquins or litters to these places of aristocratic charity, concealing their baskets and other vessels amid the curtains of their carriages, or else deputing the conveyal of them to their slaves.

Mobs and crowds of respectable people were towards eleven to be seen surrounding every stately portico in the Esquiliæ, the Carinæ, and other fashionable districts in Rome where the "kings," as the nobility were called, held their residence. The hall-door, which has stood dumb and unrelenting to so many idle hands and hungry appetites so long, at last opens, and a struggle begins around the gates. The porter—important officer of dignity!—blocks the way, and demonstrates successfully that each person must take his turn or the cook will never be able to serve them.

A queue is now formed, and one by one the expectant clients come forward for their food. Basket after basket is filled as the crowd goes by—roast meat, chickens, soup, puddings are ladled out or handed into the receptacles. Some of the baskets are so constructed as to keep the provisions hot by the contrivance of a little brazier of live coals under the tin bottom of the wickerwork crate. At last the arduous work of serving so many hungry mouths is completed. The cook has come to an end of his store, the porter

of his patience, and the last client—for the pieces have been diminishing time after time—goes away dissatisfied.

We need not follow the clients home. They arrive there with the day's meal, which suffices for themselves, their wives and families. They have thus gained their maintenance for nothing; and now the whole day is before them to do anything they list. Their usual occupation is to congregate in the Forum, and spend the afternoon in talk and idle gossip. In the evening they retire early to rest, in order to wake early the next morning and renew their life of dependency, vassalage and idleness.

But the "kings," or members of the aristocracy, pursue a very different life from the types already mentioned. They have neither to labour at the bidding of any master, to direct the labours of others like the Knights, nor to pass the day in obsequious attendance and humiliating servility like the freeborn but very spiritless clients. They live on the fat of the land; they rise late and retire late to rest; their life is a round of pleasures, which have with them, nevertheless, as serious a rotation as the business of most men.

After partaking of a delicate breakfast, they drive in their porticoes for exercise and to procure an appetite for lunch. These porticoes are large roofed roads and squares, often of a mile or more in length, constructed in the pleasure grounds of the mansion that the horse-exercise may be enabled to continue in all weathers. So luxurious, however, has the Roman noble become by this time, that the sun is too strong for his complexion, as the rain is too coarse for his clothes; and not even the balmiest sunshine and mildest summer weather can tempt him to emerge from the shady porticoes into the green, inviting, but sunny lawns beyond.

Sufficient exercise having now been taken for his health, he pays a visit of inspection to some of the more favourite parts of his house and grounds—his stables, his fish-ponds, his aviaries, his menagerie, his dog-kennels. If any slave has been unruly, he orders his execution, and for punishment makes him swim across the fish-pond, where the lampreys are kept. The immense water-snakes seize the unhappy man as he swims across, and crush him into a mummy with their coils. He dies in agony as they devour him—and the flesh of the fishes is improved.

Luncheon, entitled Prandium, now takes place.

It is a collection of lighter dishes, principally whets to the appetite, with many sauces and wine. This enables the day to be passed until the real business of the day begins, namely, dinner.

The favourite occupation in the afternoon is ball playing. The game was played in courts somewhat resembling our racquet-courts, while the recreation itself approximated greatly to "fives." The ball-play is succeeded by sedentary games, such as draughts, unless some less venial amusement, such as horse-racing or cock-fighting were

indulged in, into which we have no space here to enter. Draughts were a very fashionable before-dinner amusement, and were sometimes carried to the dinner-table and played during the first course. The draughts were often made of crystal, and the board of some costly stone.

To say that dinner was the chief occupation of wealthy Romans is no exaggeration. The vice of eating is no less seductive than is that of drinking, and infinitely more costly. To Britain, to Africa, to the Euxine, the world was ransacked for dainties to supply the evening banquets of the great in Rome. If we are present at one of these banquets we shall see better than any general description could convey to us the sort of entertainment which concluded the evening of a wealthy Roman's day.

Before sitting—we should rather say lying down, since the seats at table took the form of couches, on which the guests reclined—everyone in the company confides himself to the tender mercies of a slave in an adjoining room, who administers an emetic to each individually, in order to sharpen a languid appetite.

Places are now taken at table, and slaves begin to hand about the dishes and wine, singing perpetually a melodious strain as they do so, in tune to which the carver likewise, when his services are required, cuts the meat. The first course, agreeably to the well-known adage "from egg to apple," invariably consists of eggs—but what sort of eggs? A hen made of elegantly cut wood or moulded plaster is brought in on a dish containing straw, as if she were sitting on her eggs. She is removed by a slave, and the eggs beneath her are handed to the company, but when broken are found to be composed of sugar shells, and each inside them to have a roasted beccafico.

The second course consists of an immense architectural structure of pastry and savouries in the form of a temple. In the midst of this enormous chef d'œuvre of the cook's art is a green turf, on it a honey-comb. Various plates of pastry or vegetables are laid out around it, as are chickens; on another a hare, on another cutlets; elsewhere ducks, widgeons, quails—an array of all sorts of eatables. Round the entire structure flows a river of fish-sauce, in which fishes fried and boiled are seen apparently to swim. On the top of all is a great fountain of wine, which spurts up in a stream and is caught in an alabaster basin.

Before the next course comes on, slaves enter carrying coverlets of tapestry, on which are depicted hunting scenes. They themselves are armed with bows and spears, and dressed to represent huntsmen. They spread the coverlets over the couches, and hang up some of them round the wall.

A jingling and a shout is heard outside, the door is flung open, and immediately a boar enters the room and tears round between the tables, followed by a pack of dogs in full cry, and huntsmen behind them. The boar is caught and speared before the company—having

been previously rendered harmless by the extraction of its tusks and teeth. It is carried out of the room. A little comedy is now enacted, which has been pre-arranged between the master of the house and his cook. The cook is called up, and informed that the company desire to taste that very boar for their next course. The man promises to comply with their request, leaves the room, and, to borrow the Roman expression, "in less time than one could roast a chicken," brings in the identical boar ready cooked, and perfectly done. To show how perfect is his art, he gives one slash to the side and out tumbles a deluge of sausages. A fawn roasted whole is now served up at table. The carver inserts his knife; from the incision he makes in the stomach, a flock of thrushes fly out, which are caught by slaves stationed for that purpose about the apartment. In this way the banquet proceeds, with copious libations of wine throughout; lasting sometimes from eight to ten hours.

At imperial banquets and banquets specially splendid, other attractions were added.

Sometimes the whole roof of the chamber was suddenly lifted, and tight-rope dancers were seen walking about over the heads of the company. Sometimes dancers were admitted to career between the tables or in prepared avenues on them. Sometimes the agony of the grey mullet was displayed for the amusement of the company, in which Roman cruelty was seen to its perfection. This fish, it is well-known, changes its colour when dying, and assumes all the hues of the rainbow in succession while the death agony is upon it. Pipes were laid down communicating with the fish-ponds, the other end of the pipes being on salvers which were laid before the banqueters; the sluice was turned, and immediately a beautiful grey mullet floated, vigorous with life, on to the salver before the banqueter. The spectacle of feasting the eyes on its dying agony while the beautiful fish slowly expired on the salver, emitting all the time iridescent tints, was considered to be a sight worthy to be presented for the entertainment of friends, and of sufficient importance to justify a special and costly construction of pipes from the exterior of the mansion to the tables in the banqueting hall.

A LATE SPRING.

By G. B. Stuart.

THROUGHOUT all that vast and vague region commonly known as "abroad," the two Miss Severnes are as well known as Milan Cathedral or the Germania at Rudesheim.

Their parentage, to be sure, is English; but their tastes, habits, accomplishments and sympathies are cosmopolitan; indeed, they speak French, German and Italian better than they do English, and can make their wants known, it is hinted, in Spanish and Russian. They have a stronger personality than most of the nomad single ladies who spend their lives in floating from one Continental place to another; and they have left their kindly mark on many a German Bad-Ort or Riviera health resort or Swiss mountain hotel.

Who but the Miss Severnes built the tiny English church at Col du Midi? They could only give a few francs towards the collection themselves, it is true; but how they took the matter to heart, and worked and talked and thought for nothing else till the deed was done, and a passing bishop caught to consecrate the fait accompli! Just after this, the disastrous fire in the Grisons destroyed Pettars and all its industries; luckily the Miss Severnes were summering at Grindelwald, and the bazaar which they hastily inaugurated at their hotel put the curé of the place in possession of a hundred pounds with which to start his wood-carvers afresh. The following winter they took a sick young governess into their apartment at Florence, and nursed her through the severe attack of malarial fever, which resulted—not in the death of the patient, which all the English community had breathlessly looked for during three weeks of anxiety—but in her happy marriage with the Italian doctor, almost before her cropped hair had grown again.

But it is needless to go on quoting instances of their energy and kindness: everyone who knows anything of the Continent must have experienced them, directly or indirectly. Fortunate those whose paths have crossed the Miss Severnes', and who have heard their hearty "Au revoir," "Auf Wiedersehn," "A Rivederci," at parting, as the case might be.

In person they are tall and comely ladies of a certain age. Miss Severne, who has the rare Roman nose and the presence of Du Maurier's "Duchess," is a manly (not a mannish) woman; and her Christian name, Sydney, is, curiously, suitable for either sex. She has a singularly wide grasp of all the social and political questions of the day, imbibed from the newspapers of all nations which, affixed to uncomfortably long sticks, she has studied in all the public newsrooms of the world.

Obstacles are of no account to Miss Severne: she has been seen to possess herself of the *Allgemeine Zeitung*, wresting it out of the very hands of an astonished Prussian lieutenant, and pushing an old copy of *Kladderadatch* into its place, with such an air that the defrauded officer could only salute, with his heels brought together and his hand to his ear, as if a great honour had been done him.

Miss Anne, her sister, is made of softer stuff, and is eight or ten years younger, having still a slight, youthful figure and a charmingly pink complexion. At a distance she looks like Miss Severne's daughter or niece; but when you see her closer you observe the fine network of delicate wrinkles, the pensive droop of the mouth, the rather languid blue eyes, which tell of more than forty years of what is known as "indifferent health."

It was for Miss Anne's health, or rather want of it, that the sisters first took up their roving life twenty years ago.

The plan has so far answered that Miss Anne, at forty-two, is far stronger, livelier and more usefully happy than she was as a girl of twenty in the secluded country village of which her father was rector, and where with her father's death every tie of relationship was severed. They were positively without kith and kin in the world: there was nobody to say that the Severne girls were turning their backs on home duties when they elected to exchange the green solitudes of Loamshire for the varied scenes of the Continent; no one to hint at neglected responsibilities when they slipped into the foreign fashion of passing from place to place with the change of seasons, and did not return to Dumbridge at all.

"The greatest conceivable blessing," Miss Severne was fond of saying, in her deep, cultivated voice, "is to occupy a position in which you need not refer your conduct to anybody's criticism:" not that any of Miss Severne's friends could imagine her submitting the pros and cons of her doings to any less august tribunal than her own opinion.

As for Miss Anne, she accepted her elder sister's dictum as to the desirability of being sans famille as unhesitatingly as she accepted everything else that Sydney proposed for her good. Sydney knew so very much best about everything! and if her heart sometimes unconsciously yearned towards the young people she met in her travels, who, in point of age might have been her own children, or nephews and nieces, had she and Sydney not stood so persistently alone in the world—she hid the passing weakness from her sister, almost even from herself, with the feeling that it was akin to treachery.

Miss Anne had gone so far as to kiss an Italian peasant woman's baby, when she was out one day by herself, but she would have died with shame to think that such a proceeding could come to Miss Sydney's ears: Miss Sydney had never been known to notice a child, unless to point out to its mother or attendant that it was becoming bandy from being set to walk too soon, or that its eyes were growing

weak from exposure to the light, or that it suffered from some other of the hundred and one small ailments which never afflict old maids' children.

But, in spite of some little peculiarities, you might search the length and breadth of "abroad" without finding two kinder, warmer or more generous hearts than those that beat under the black silk bodices of the Miss Severnes: black silk had been the proper wear for a rector's daughters when the Severnes left Loamshire, and it had remained their favourite wear ever since, never looking over smart, and seldom more shabby than real gentility admits of. Their sedate attire was varied by very cheerful, even brilliant, bonnets, whose adoption was regulated by the feasts of the Church, Easter producing a crop of primroses and Parma violets, Whitsuntide a wealth of white ribbons, the later Sundays in Trinity coronals of autumn foliage in various shades of velvet, which were, in themselves, a noticeable form of Church decoration.

Easter Sunday at Badwiesen, that little Rhine town that is always gay and warm and beloved of its visitors at all seasons of the year, had filled the new English Church to overflowing; it was a late Easter, and the spring tourists were treading fast on the heels of the winter visitors; though, as a rule, the two sets kept distinct from each other.

The Miss Severnes, in all the seasonable glory of white and coloured lilac bunches surmounting their last year's bonnets, which had been deftly rejuvenated by Miss Anne's quick fingers, occupied their usual place, the second pew from the harsh little harmonium which led the musical devotions of the Badwiesen English. It was the sort of harmonium which is so often to be found in new churches and schoolrooms, an instrument against which all right-thinking people possessed of ear and voice do their best to uplift a protesting tune, and which generally succeeds in droning down the cheerfulest melody. Where the hymn-tunes in Badwiesen Church would have been but for the Severnes it is hard to say, but Miss Anne had a clear sweet treble which no masterful Gregorian chant could betray either into sharpness or flatness, while Miss Severne's very excellent imitation of a bass always seemed to reprove and keep in order the unruly tones of the creaking harmonium.

"Our triumphant Holy-day!" sang Miss Anne Severne, in the introductory Easter Hymn, as the chaplain took his place, and the handful of English boys who were his pupils filed in to the chancel seats behind him, clad for the first time in the snowy surplices at which all the ladies of the congregation, headed by Miss Sydney, had been working so assiduously during Lent.

"Young Hazell has fastened his hind side before!" whispered Miss Sydney to her sister in a tone of suppressed fury; "that boy must be half-witted, and the others encourage him"—but Miss Anne made no reply, for the hymn had come to an end, and in the

moment's pause that followed, the German waiter, who was picking up English rapidly by a voluntary attendance at all the English services as verger, hurried a party of late comers to the very top of the church and installed them in the front pew. By which action he showed that he was picking up English customs, at least, as fast as he could!

Then the chaplain began the sentences, and the late comers settled themselves as well as they were able in their seats, which being immediately in front of the reading-desk were as exposed, as inconvenient and uncomfortable as possible, and the congregation were at liberty to regard their backs or their profiles during the remainder of the service with that interest which a small, self-satisfied community always accords to a new element, and which in Badwiesen is the special attitude of the winter residents towards the spring visitors.

The party who occupied the front pew were three in number, and the male sex predominated, in itself an unusual occurrence. There was a tall, grizzled man of the Anglo-Indian "Colonel" type, a fresh-faced slip of a schoolboy with just enough likeness and unlikeness to the elder man to suggest that his wife might have been a plump, pink-and-white lady, with fair hair and blue eyes like the boy's; and a tiny girl of six or thereabouts, with an anxious little face, long drooping curls, and the cumbersome, old-fashioned dress by which widowers' children are so often to be distinguished.

The Colonel (there was no mistaking his military bearing) had a hatband round his tall hat, which, like every true Englishman, he had brought abroad for Sunday observance; the schoolboy, who was dressed with all the precision of Harrow or Eton at fourteen, had a band likewise and a black silk necktie; but if further confirmation had been needed of the decease of the pink-and-white, flaxen-haired mother it was surely to be found in the heavy felt hat and ostrich feather, the cumbrous black cloth pelisse and the kid gloves, a size too large, which enveloped the little girl beside them. A pair of thin white thread socks, ending in rather clumsy laced boots, which stuck out at right angles to her little bundle of a body when her father lifted her on to the seat, made Miss Anne shiver.

"A nice comfortable pair of black stockings and a black sash on a white serge dress and jacket would have been mourning enough for that mite," she had hastily decided before she was half way through the "Te Deum;" though, to be sure, it was no business of hers.

Presently, as the long church service wore on, the little girl in the front pew began to weary of following the places which her father so painstakingly pointed out to her in her prayer-book; she listened with evident interest to the story of the first lesson, and at its close appealed to the Colonel with some question about the Egyptians, which had to be suppressed or postponed; after that her attention wandered, and by dint of wriggling during the Litany she managed to command a view of the pew behind her, and thus to put herself as it were en rapport with Miss Anne Severne's pleasant face.

"For all sick persons—and young children," intoned the Chaplain: was there any harm in it, that Miss Anne's eyes smiled back at the little girl who had no mother, while her lips repeated for once mechanically, "We beseech Thee to hear us, Good Lord?"

Miss Sydney would have been very much annoyed had she noticed it, for, as the late Rector's daughter, she strongly advocated correct behaviour in church, only reserving to herself the right of whispering comments of disapproval in cases of levity.

By the time the service was over, Miss Anne Severne and the little girl in black were firm friends: they had mentally come to several conclusions about each other, little Molly Broke approving Miss Severne's lilac bonnet and delicate light gloves as heartily as the latter commiserated the other's heavy mourning; their friendship was established on a thoroughly feminine basis, but dress is often an index of something deeper.

"I want to look at my pretty lady all over," whispered Molly excitedly to her father, tugging at his hand as the congregation streamed out into the sunshine after church. Perhaps it was the dazzle of the sudden brightness, or the little crush at the door that confused the child, for how it happened the Colonel could never say, but in an instant she had twisted herself out of his grasp, and, turning to look behind her, stumbled and fell the whole length of six steep steps on to the stone pavement below.

A dozen hands were outstretched to help, but it was Miss Anne Severne who was kneeling in a moment beside the stunned child and held her softly in her lap regardless of the blood which dropped in heavy round patches upon the black silk dress and lilac bonnet strings.

"I don't think it is very serious," she said, bravely smiling up in Colonel Broke's agonised face; "she is frightened and confused a little, and it has made her nose bleed; but if you will let me take her into our house opposite I think a little sal volatile will put her all right, and we will make her tidy for you again."

And without waiting for permission, Miss Anne marched across the road with the dishevelled little girl held tight in her arms, straight in at the porte cochère of the white villa where the ladies had their modest flat.

Of the little crowd at the church door everybody was astonished to see such independent action on the part of the younger Miss Severne. Miss Sydney, who had lingered an instant behind to reprove the unwary Hazell, came hurrying out and learnt what had happened just in time to extend a properly majestic recognition to the Anglo-Indian Colonel, who, with his boy, was hesitating at the doorway of the villa, up whose wide staircase Miss Anne had disappeared with his child.

"We are fortunate in being so close at hand, and thus enabled to render your daughter some slight assistance," perorated Miss Severne in the voice she had inherited from the Rector.

The Colonel lifted his hat and stepped a pace or two back from the staircase up which he longed to rush three steps at a time, and whence the rustle of Miss Anne's silk skirts had ceased with the shutting of a door above.

"My name is Broke—Colonel Broke," he said; "my children and I only arrived last evening and put up at the Hotel de l'Europe; it is such a long way to the other side of the town, otherwise you should not have been troubled with my poor little Molly's catastrophe. I'm afraid your—er—er—friend has been put to a great deal of trouble;" and again he looked longingly at the staircase.

"My sister," Miss Severne said a little stiffly—she was not accustomed to meeting people who did not know who the Miss Severnes were—"has had a good deal of delicate health, and will consequently know exactly what is right to recover your little daughter," and with that she began slowly to ascend the stairs, signing imperially to the Brokes, father and son, to follow.

All this had taken time, and Miss Severne was not a person to hurry either her words or actions, so that by the time the party had reached the glass door on the second landing which gave entrance to her apartment, Miss Anne, with the quick, clever touches which she kept for the assistance of other people, had staunched the trickling blood from Molly's nostrils, washed her pale face, and pulling off the objectionable hat and pelisse, had disclosed a deep white lace frill on a sombre little black gown, which gave her the air of a small Puritan.

They were friends in a minute, these two. Molly tossed off the wine-glassful of hot, sweet stuff that Miss Anne prepared from one of her little bottles without a word of demur, and by the time the footsteps of the others were heard outside the glass door, she had a little pink in her cheeks again, and asked appealingly:

"May I open the door for papa, please?"

"How do you do, little girl? I trust you are recovered?" said Miss Severne, sailing in, but Molly, who did not know that her interlocutor was almost a public character, dashed into her father's arms, with:

"Oh, papa! I'm so glad to see you. I'm all right again, and Miss Anne has put me straight, and she says I am to stop to dinner, if you'll let me, only I'm afraid I have spoilt her new bonnet strings!"

Miss Anne, who, now the excitement was over, had time to realise that she had acted independently for the first time in her life, had retreated to her own room at the end of the little passage to remove her bonnet and mantle, and perhaps to allow the new elements to settle down in the drawing-room. By the time she had smoothed her already ultra smooth hair, folded her outdoor things away and washed her hands, she felt sure that Sydney's master mind would have put everything in the way of introduction or explanation on a proper footing.

"My sister, Miss Anne Severne—Colonel Broke," introduced Miss Severne from her arm-chair, as the gentleman rose to greet the soft-faced, middle-aged lady, whom he now saw to be less young than he had thought her when she passed him hurriedly with Molly in her arms. He bowed in an old-fashioned manner before he took Anne's out-stretched hand, but Molly marred the solemnity of the ceremony by clutching at her new friend's skirts with a reassuring:

"You may call her 'Miss Anne,' papa, if you like; at least she says I may, and I'm to stop and have soup with A's and B's floating in it!"

"If you lie quietly down on the sofa for a quarter of an hour till Kätchen lays the dinner, I said," and Miss Anne lifted up the child and put her down upon a distant sofa, seating herself at its foot, a little out of reach of Colonel Broke's thanks and excuses.

"Colonel Henry Broke, Bengal Staff Corps," read Miss Severne from the narrow black-edged visiting card which their new acquaintance left behind him in the little lobby when a few hours after he came to fetch away his child.

"A gentleman-like person, apparently; but, Anne, we can't have the little girl here very often if you persist in playing with her till you become quite flushed. Lie down at once, and don't speak again till coffee comes up."

During the weeks that followed, Colonel Broke and his family grew very intimate with the Miss Severnes. Hardly a day passed that Gavin Broke's long legs did not carry him up their staircase, bearing some note or message from his father, and many coffee-drinking drives and expeditions to neighbouring sights were the result of little Molly's tumble down the church steps. Molly was generally panting up behind her brother, for she could not hear of anyone going to visit her Miss Anne without her; and presently the Colonel would follow, just to see what had become of his children, and to make sure that they were not teasing the ladies, or taking up too much of their time. Miss Sydney talked Indian politics and the Ilbert Bill with the Colonel, while Miss Anne played beggar-my-neighbour with Gavin and Molly on the end of the sofa, all three of them laughing and eager to win the chocolate or *marron glacé* that the lady invariably produced for a prize. Sometimes the Colonel's eyes would stray to the group, which Miss Severne reproved for making so much noise; he would grow fidgety in his chair and give his hostess such random answers about the state of public feeling in Calcutta that she began to wonder whether the climate there might not have slightly affected his brain.

One day Molly came bustling in with a long, narrow parcel, which she pressed into Miss Anne's hands: "It's from me, because I spoilt your pretty new ones that Sunday. At least"—here absolute truthfulness asserted itself—"papa ordered them to come from

Paris, only he said I was to say they was my present;" and she was in a fever of impatience until the papers had been unfastened and the pretty delicate box disclosed, full of long and many-buttoned French gloves of the softest shades.

Miss Anne was quite in a flutter at this present, and doubtful whether she ought to accept it from a comparative stranger, but fortunately the offering tallied with Miss Severne's notions of what was suitable to the occasion, and she told her sister that a lady might always accept flowers, books or gloves from an acquaintance, even a male acquaintance—especially when the little gift was presented in so tasteful a manner through the little girl; and there was nothing more for Miss Anne to do but to hug Molly, and murmur some shy thanks to Colonel Broke at their next meeting, which made that gallant officer blush almost as pinkly as she did herself over their utterance.

"Pooh! pooh! Miss Anne," he disclaimed, "I couldn't allow you to spoil your things on that tiresome child's account and not endeavour to replace them; if I had dared I should like to have replaced the injured bonnet, though I doubt if Paris would have produced anything so becoming."

"The bonnet was of no consequence, it was not a new one—I have easily put it to rights again."

"New or not, it is the prettiest bonnet I have ever seen," affirmed the Colonel, with decision, and just then Miss Severne came bustling up with the latest news of the Bulgarian Question culled from the reading-room, and Miss Anne and the Colonel started apart as if they had been talking treason.

Was it treason, Anne Severne wondered, when she began to realise how much she was engaging these new elements of interest in her life?

The little salon, which was voted the prettiest in all Badwiesen, with its stands of ferns and mignonette, its ribbon-tied antimacassars and numberless knick-knacks, seemed so dull and empty if Molly and Gavin were not in it. Miss Severne sometimes grumbled for the quiet times that preceded their acquaintance with the Brokes, and then her younger sister felt constrained to dismiss the children at the porte cochère, or cut short their visits with a kindly "Now, Gavin, I think you must be going home;" but for her all the light of those spring days was reflected from the two young faces so continually lifted up to hers. Gavin found her the most sympathetic confidante of all his hopes and expectations for the future; he almost forgot the protest which he felt bound to make, as an English public schoolboy, against spending his holidays abroad when he was talking to Miss Anne, who listened with delight to his experiences of life as seen from the "shell," while Molly, less voluble, was even more convincing with her whispered "I love you, I love you," and her soft stroking of Miss Anne's cheek.

The sweetness of stolen waters was in these caresses, for Miss

Sydney had said one day that she objected to seeing Anne allow herself to be "fingered over" by that child, and after that Anne repressed little Molly's attentions if her sister were present. But she took the children long walks in the woods, when they might all do exactly what they pleased, having slipped away from a coffee drinking on the terrace of the Kurhaus, where the band played of an afternoon, and where it was the custom of the Brokes to look for the two ladies after the early Badwiesen dinner.

"So your holidays haven't been so bad after all?" said Colonel Broke to his boy, whom he had accompanied on the first stage of his journey towards England, when the Harrow vacation came to an end. There were still a few minutes before the express started, and father and son were walking up and down the platform of the big central station, two hours out of Badwiesen, arm-in-arm.

"No, not half bad," Gavin was obliged to admit; "but that was thanks to Miss Anne, not to Germany! I say, father, couldn't you get her anyhow to come over to Broke when I'm home in the summer, and keep house for us? A fellow ought to have a home where he can ask other fellows, and if there isn't any lady——Oh, I know—I didn't mean—nothing could be jollier than you always are, father," squeezing the Colonel's arm affectionately, and dimly conscious that he might have wounded him, or have sounded unmindful of his dead mother, "but if you could persuade Miss Anne to come over to England during the 'long,' I know she'd like it, for I was telling her about Broke the other day, and she said she'd like to see it awfully!"

"There's Miss Severne," said the Colonel smiling, but treating the question quite seriously.

"Whew! so there is! I suppose they wouldn't separate? Well," heroically, "we must have her too; there's plenty of room at Broke, and you can order a lot of newspapers!" and with this, Gavin took his seat in the train, and was presently borne away westward, leaning out of the window, and shouting his last commands to his father, "Get her if you can!"

"I will," muttered the Colonel, marching across the station, to find the Badwiesen train.

A couple of hours later Colonel Broke, hastening through the Kurgarten on his way to the Severnes' house, where he expected to find his little girl, came upon a sight which strangely fitted in with the musings which had occupied him since his parting with Gavin.

His thoughts had run upon the past, and the future—the past, a short married life with his cousin Clara, who had proved unable to stand the Indian climate, and had brought home her children and died herself before her husband could rejoin her in England—a sad little episode in his toilsome Indian life, over which, however, he did not pretend to grieve very passionately, for cousin Clara had not proved herself more of a helpmeet than the average semi-invalidish Indian lady.

The future—one big difficulty, beginning with, going on with, and ending with the children. Gavin was already beginning to feel the want of a lady at Broke. What little Molly might feel the want of, as time went on, and perhaps be unable to express, the Colonel could not bear to think. And for himself—a vision of someone of his own generation to be his companion after this interminable eighteen months spent alone with the children—to give him counsel and support, and to sympathise and make plain where he blundered or hesitated.

"Yes, I will get her if I can," said Henry Broke, striding up to the seat where Miss Anne was working at her embroidery, and little Molly leaned with both arms on her lap, listening to a fairy tale.

"But why didn't the Princess fly away with the Prince in the carriage drawn by white doves?" Molly demanded.

"Because she had her work to do; and people can't always go away and do what they like. Molly, here's your father; run and ask him what news of Gavin." And Miss Anne rose up hastily, for she was shy of telling her stories before any grown-up person.

Colonel Broke caught his little girl and set her on his shoulder. "It is time for this young woman to have her tea, and I am going to take her back to Elizabeth. Will you wait for me here five minutes, Miss Severne? I will not be longer, and there is something I want to consult you about."

Miss Anne returned placidly enough to her embroidery on the seat under the magnolia tree. She wondered in what way her advice could be of any value to the gentleman, and concluded that he must be thinking of changing his hotel, or perhaps of giving up the water-cure which, in a desultory fashion, he was trying for a rheumatic arm. When he came back she made room for him on the seat beside her, and politely folding up her work, waited for him to speak.

But apparently this was the difficulty. Colonel Broke leant forward and kicked the gravel with the toe of his boot; leant back and stared at Miss Anne's ear and the wave of light brown hair which was plaited smoothly behind it; and presently, by turning impatiently round in his corner of the seat, met her eyes fixed full upon him, with the unspoken "Well, what is it?" looking out of their innocent depths.

"Anne, I want you to marry me," said he, leaning towards her. "I know I am asking you very suddenly; but I don't think we need beat about the bush, like a boy and girl of eighteen. You know what men are; so I daresay you have formed a very just estimate of what I am like. And you know the children. You are the only woman I have ever seen that I would ask to come and be a mother to Gavin and Molly; but I know it will not only be to their advantage, but the greatest delight that I could give them. As for myself, I can't tell you what you will be to me! I would rather try and tell

you how happy I will make you—how happy you will make us all, if you will come back with us to Broke. Will you think of it, dear Anne?"

All this time the Colonel kept his eyes on her face; and gradually, as the meaning of his words came to her, Anne's blue eyes filled with tears, then dropped, and two large tears splashed on to her lap.

It was then that Colonel Broke ventured to take the slender white hand that lay ungloved upon her work, and Anne did not withdraw it, though she felt very foolish and shy, and longed for Sydney to come and tell her what to do. But Sydney was, presumably, in the reading-room, as her wont was at five o'clock in the afternoon; and when Anne murmured something about her sister, Colonel Broke said gravely that it was a matter for them alone to settle: if Anne would give him her answer, he would go at once to Miss Severne and beg for her approval; or if she had been taken too much by surprise, he would ask for her decision to-morrow; but in either case he wished her to follow the dictates of her own heart.

Perhaps Colonel Broke scented Miss Severne's contempt of matrimony, and feared its effect upon his plan; or perhaps, with the fastidiousness of a lover—though he disclaimed all sentimentalities as unsuitable to a widower of fifty—he wanted Anne to give herself to him without even discussing the pros and cons of the affair with her only sister. Be that as it may, his determination and resolute bearing had the same effect on his companion as her sister's masterfulness. Miss Anne agreed to consider the matter until next day, and almost promised to do so without taking Sydney into counsel; and the look which she gave the Colonel at parting, when he held her hand and forced her eyes to meet his, sent him away with a smile and a pleasant feeling of security as to what that decision would be.

Some feeling of disingenuousness towards her sister drove Miss Anne into the little salon of their apartment directly she had taken off her bonnet, though she would have far preferred to sit awhile in her own room, facing the wonderful proposition which Colonel Broke had just made her. She had just enough fear of her elder sister to make her anxious to avoid any action that might provoke criticism on this particular occasion; and ordinarily it was not her custom to retire to her room after a stroll in the gardens.

Had either sister been in her normal frame of mind, she must have noticed something unusual in the behaviour of the other. Miss Severne had not been out to the reading-room, but was sitting in the full glare of the April sunshine which filled the little salon; and though the warm rays fell upon her, and the room seemed close and oppressively airless to Miss Anne, the elder lady turned with a shiver to greet her, dropping some papers as she did so into the old-fashioned rosewood desk which she had been ransacking.

"You are late," she said querulously; "coffee has been ready for

half-an-hour, and is undrinkably cold now. And how hot your cheeks look," she went on in a fault-finding tone which was unusual, and almost made Miss Anne fancy that her secret had somehow preceded her.

She put up her hands to her cheeks in a deprecating way: "This room is very warm after the outside air."

"Warm!" caught up Miss Severne; "you must be feverish if you find it warm. I shouldn't wonder if you have caught something, Anne, rushing about in the way you do with those children, when you know very well you are not able for it. I shall be thankful when they are all gone, and you settle down again. What is the good of my having given up my whole life for you, if you are going to sacrifice yours for the first strangers you fall in with? I begin to think that I have had all my work for nothing."

Miss Anne was thunderstruck. This was a fatal beginning to the explanation which she had hoped by slow degrees to make to her sister; she could not even guess at the feelings which were working in Miss Sydney's mind, or refer to its real cause this unprovoked attack; so she silently set herself to pour out the lukewarm coffee, and carried her sister's cup round to her in as good an imitation of her usual manner as she could muster, but her hand shook and she put the cup down awkwardly, dropping the little sugar biscuit that went with it on to Miss Severne's lap.

"I know you are going to be ill!" and Miss Severne snatched her warm fingers in a clutch that was singularly sharp and cold. Then to Anne's utter amazement the elder lady caught her breath in a strange way and suddenly burst into a fit of sobbing, leaning her grey head and trim muslin cap against her sister's breast.

If Anne was thunderstruck before, the whole world went round with her now. She had never, in all their many years of close companionship, seen Miss Sydney's tears, and she was as ignorant of their cause as of any means of allaying them. She could only kneel beside her sister, with a piteous white face from whence all the roses had fled, and put her arms round her, calling her all sorts of pet names as if they were children together again, and as if she were the elder, the consoler, the comforter, as Sydney had ever been.

Presently Miss Severne's tears stopped as suddenly as they had begun; she sat upright, pushing Anne gently back, though she still knelt beside her chair with one arm about her, and said with a tremulous laugh: "I'm better now, Anne; I am sorry I frightened you so; I did not know I was going to be so foolish. The truth is, it is I, not you, who am a little out of sorts; but that fit of crying has done me a world of good, though it has made you as white as a ghost! There, drink up your coffee—I don't believe you have ever seen me cry before, Anne, which is a good deal to say of more than forty years together. But as I said, it has done me good—and done you good, too, indirectly, for I was very cross to you just now, and

somehow the tears have washed all that away. We haven't often been cross to each other in our forty years, have we?"

"Never," said Miss Anne, fervently, leaning closer to her sister, and wondering dimly if this strange day had any further surprises in store. "Never, Sydney, and I don't think we shall begin now. But what makes you feel upset? Have you—has anything——?" She stopped short, hardly knowing what to ask.

"I've been an old fool," Miss Severne declared stoutly, in something of her ordinary manner. "To tell you the truth, I've been exhuming a ghost"—and her hand felt for the old desk which stood close by. "I thought I shouldn't mind looking it in the face after a quarter of a century, but I'm not as brave as I fancied I was, and this has been the result, I'm ashamed to say."

"A ghost of what?" faltered Miss Anne.

"A ghost of a lover," Miss Sydney answered. "Are you surprised, Anne? I don't suppose you ever imagined that I knew what a lover was, but I had one once—and a handsome one too—only—" and here she laughed constrainedly, and as if to give the conversation a less serious turn—"you see it came to nothing."

"Why did it come to nothing?" Anne asked. She felt a queer distaste of this story, which had come to light so inopportunely like a shadow to that happy scene that she had taken part in an hour before; yet she was impelled to question her sister, if only out of that sympathy against which Miss Sydney had steeled herself so long.

"Oh, for various reasons." Miss Severne's reply was evasive and halting. "It was before we left Dumbridge, of course. He was a doctor who had the practice for a few months; the last year you were at school. Then he went away to Edinburgh, and he wrote and asked if I would—if I would go there too. I turned up two or three letters written just at that time, when I was hunting through my old desk for our Paraguay Coupons to send to Mr. Taper to-morrow. He is anxious about those Paraguays, I know; he doesn't think much of their soundness."

"But why didn't you go to Edinburgh, Sydney?" persisted Miss Anne, putting her head down on her sister's shoulder, out of sight, and softly stroking her hand.

"Because, as I told you, I had other duties. Our father died that year, and I had your health to think of; you could not have stood a home in the North, and—and—we could do better together on the Continent than anywhere separate in England. I'm sure I've never regretted it for a moment," said Miss Severne bravely, giving Anne's hand a tight squeeze; "and I don't think you have either. We've been more to each other than most husbands and wives, and I trust we shall have many a year together still: the chain that holds us is not likely to break now." And she turned and kissed her sister's cheek.

"The chain that binds us!"

The words dropped like lead upon Anne's heart. In a flash she saw the future stretching out before her—wide, empty, silent, as a long foreign road, down which she and Sydney were to pass together, two single, solitary women: a road that would never lead to an English home, to the honour and pride of a good man's love, to the kisses of little children. There was another future that she dared not look upon—Sydney had had a glimpse of it, too, five-and-twenty years back, and had turned resolutely from it for her sake. Miss Anne was silent a moment, then she took up her end of the chain without a backward glance.

"You ought to go and lie down for an hour," she said, decisive towards her sister for the first time in her life. "See, here is Kätchen with the evening letters—one for you—from Mr. Taper, I believe; you can take it with you and read it in your room, and I will come and tuck you up, and call you when supper is ready."

But Miss Severne, with a quick resumption of her usual dignity and business habits, was cutting open the lawyer's letter with her little Swiss paper-knife. She was standing beside the table whence Kätchen was removing the untasted coffee. "The Paraguays, Anne!" she said in a high, unnatural voice. Then she swung forward and fell—stricken by paralysis.

When Colonel Broke called next morning to ask for Miss Anne, he encountered Kätchen on the outer landing, ready to answer all inquiries and to prevent either visitors or noise penetrating further.

"Miss Severne was very ill; Miss Anne could see nobody; there was a hospital nurse expected every moment, and if the gracious gentleman would leave a card ——"

Plainly Kätchen did not want him to remain parleying there, and he went away very sorrowful, all the pleasant hopes of yesterday dashed and shaken. And by-and-by came a little note from Miss Anne, who, in the midst of her trouble, had remembered that he was waiting for his answer, begging kindly but firmly to decline his offer. "She and her sister," she said, "were too old to part now, and she believed she was doing her best for everyone in deciding to remain his very sincere friend, ANNE SEVERNE."

Colonel Broke did not realise how much his heart was set upon having Anne Severne for his wife till he returned to Badwiesen a few weeks later and found that the ladies had departed. A sudden feverish attack, which had left Molly fractious and pale, had driven him back to England to establish the child at the seaside, but that done he had found himself more lonely and at a loss than ever. The Badwiesen villa seemed the only spot on earth that at all represented home to him, and in spite of his oft-repeated assertions that "once he got to England again he should know where he was well off, and stop there," he retraced his journey as quickly as possible, to

climb the well-known stone stairs in vain, and learn from a communicative Putz-frau on the landing that the English ladies were gone.

"Die Kranke? Ach, du lieber! There was no recovery for her; her wits were completely gone, but the other, Das Schwesterchen, she was a heaven's angel, if ever there were one; she nursed her night and day, for they could not long afford to keep the hospital sister; and now she had taken her away in a chair to the mountains, and the furniture and the good English beds, and the pictures and everything had been sold to Herr Vogler, the house-agent, to pay the ladies' debts before they went away."

"To pay their debts?" the Colonel repeated, as if he did not understand.

"Lieber! yes," Frau Muller went on, delighted to gossip; "illness is so great an expense, and Fraulein Anna spared nothing for her sister, not even the great doctor from Cassel, that cost, Frau Muller had heard, a hundred mark an hour; as for herself, she thought that when once the sick one was stricken it was useless to take bread out of the mouths of the living."

"But the ladies were comfortably off," interrupted Colonel Broke. He did not like discussing such a subject with the charwoman, but he had no choice; the information he must have, and she could not be a common woman who spoke of Anne Severne as a "heaven's angel."

"Ah, then the gracious gentleman had not heard what it was that caused poor Fraulein Severne's *Schlag?* It was no less a thing than the loss of more than half their income. Frau Muller had had it from Kätchen, the maid, that Fraulein Anna had cried and kissed her, when she paid her wages (such wages too! Kätchen said she would always live with English people in future!), and had told her that she could not keep a servant any longer, because the money that came from America had all disappeared. That was the meaning of the stroke, and of selling the furniture, and leaving the town, natürlich!"

Colonel Broke stemmed this torrent of talk at last with a two mark piece, and came away with the Severnes' address in his pocket-book, and with a firmer determination than ever to follow Miss Anne to the world's end in his heart.

There is a sunshiny, white country road just outside Geneva, which leads to a little suburban Etablissement de Bains. One afternoon Colonel Broke made his way along this unfrequented Chemin Châtillon, glancing with his eyeglasses sharply from side to side at the garden gateposts, whose numbers were half-hidden by dusty wisteria and drooping laburnum seed-pods.

Thirteen, fifteen, seventeen, and then, no nineteen, as might have been expected, but a hiatus altogether, a bit of oak-paling and a fresh start of tiny, retiring country houses buried in creepers, calling themselves "Mon Repos," "Mon Désir," "Colabri," with no numbers at all.

The Englishman turned round with an impatient exclamation—was he never to get to his journey's end? And there, not twenty yards from him, on the opposite path, was his journey's end coming to him.

Anne Severne, with her arms full of some heavy books, her eyes cast down, and her face, that was sweeter even than he remembered it, unconscious of his scrutiny. He had a moment's time to notice that she was older, sadder, slower in her movements, as she toiled along the shingly path with her burden of books; then his shadow fell across her, and as she looked up he took a great parcel out of her hands without a word, and turned to walk beside her.

"You see I have come after you," he said gently, and without looking at her; "both of us had our hands so full that last week at Badwiesen that we could not attend to our own affairs. Now I have taken Molly to England, and have come back to speak to you.—How is your sister?" abruptly changing the subject.

"No better," faltered Miss Anne; "worse, I fear. I hoped a great deal from the waters here, and the air is said to be specially beneficial for—for cases like hers—but she does not know me, Colonel Broke, and she cannot speak or ——" there was no need to finish the sentence.

"And how are you yourself?" the Colonel asked.

"Oh, I'm very well," Miss Anne answered hurriedly; "there is so much to be done that I have no time to be other than well," but her slow, tired step, and the sudden rush of tears to her eyes at his kind voice belied her words.

"And what are all these books?"

"Some for study, and some for a little venture in translating that I am making."

"Do you find time for study and translating when you are nursing your sister? Are you not overdoing it, Miss Anne?"

"I think—you don't understand, perhaps," she began falteringly. "You know that we are worse off than we used to be, owing to the Paraguay failure in the spring, and I have some pupils here in Geneva, as well as some translating to do for a French publishing firm—indeed, it is not only for the help it brings in, but now that I have lost my dear Sydney's companionship, it gives me a kind of interest; it is better than ——"

"For better, for worse," quoted Colonel Broke irrelevantly, stopping short, and wheeling round so as to face his companion. "Look here, Miss Anne, don't you think that Molly and Gavin and I would make better companions for you than wretched little Swiss children or musty old books? As long as your sister and you were all in all to each other, I felt that Miss Severne was a formidable rival, whose prior claim I hardly ventured to dispute; but now that her mind has gone——forgive me, Anne, but I must speak plainly for all our sakes. She is your care still, but not your companion, and you must not be

allowed to sacrifice yourself to an imaginary duty. If you care for me a little, and for my children, as I think you did in the gardens at Badwiesen that day, let us be married here, dear Anne, without loss of time, and then we will take your sister back to Broke and make her as happy as we can."

"She gave up everything once for me," said Miss Anne feebly.

"And now you have to give up a great many things for her," the Colonel answered cheerfully: "your independence, your pride (eh? Anne), your life on the Continent, your translating!" and with that all the heavy German books tumbled down in the dust, and as there was not a soul visible along all the wide road, Colonel Broke took both Anne Severne's hands and kissed her.

Anne Broke always feels that in force of character she has fallen lamentably short of her sister Sydney's standard in marrying the Colonel. She wonders sometimes if Sydney understands this new combination as she sits smiling, well cared for, impassive, in her invalid chair, under the elms on the lawn at Broke, or by the library window in winter time. Anne's life is so full of interests, of the affairs of her husband and step-children, her household and the parish, she thanks God daily for her happy, busy lot, with an undiminished astonishment that she was chosen, and Sydney, so manifestly her superior, left. But everything is an astonishment nowadays. Molly sits on the step of Aunt Sydney's chair by the hour together, talking to her in a grave, patronising strain about rabbits and kittens, and such like small deer, and Miss Severne looks up at her with pleased, eager eyes, and is quite happy.

SONNET.

THE whole day long chased by the eager sun,
From yellow morn, the fleet young hours fly,
O'er dewy mountain-tops, up silent sky;
Down o'er the western hills they swift speed on,
Still seeming within reach and never won.
Behind the hot sun presses breathlessly,
But fresh as at their dawn, o'er the cool sea
He sees them glide, then drop down one by one;
He slacks the reins, he lifts his fevered head,
Throws back his humid locks—then casts a glance,
Embracing all the height and vast expanse
Of heaving seas, broad earth and burning air:
One look of desolation and despair,
For that day gone—for those fair hours fled.

JULIA KAVANAGH.

FAIR NORMANDY.

By Charles W. Wood, F.R.G.S., Author of "Through Holland," "Letters from Majorca," etc. etc.

Caen.

THE interest of Caen is martial, as well as ecclesiastical and historical. Above the town rises the castle, which, though a scene of greatness and excitement in the old days, is now converted into homely barracks, where the soldiers pass a sleepy existence. The only personage who is apparently very much awake is the sentry. Woe unto you if you attempt to pass through the sacred portals. He charges you, and rudely commands a retreat. If you hesitate, he looks at his bayonet as if hesitating whether to run you through at once or give you yet another chance for life. On the whole, as discretion is the better part of valour, you retire across the drawbridge.

One regrets the restriction, for the castle commands the town, and the view must be magnificent. You notice the strong walls flanked with towers, which look as if they would defy time itself. And they have done no less, for the castle was built by William the Conqueror, the fortifications were enlarged and strengthened by Henry I. of England, and rebuilt by Louis XII. and Francis I. The donjon, in which many a prisoner has sighed out his weary existence, was happily destroyed by the Convention : and the days of donjons, inquisitions and torture-chambers we may well hope have departed for ever.

From the upper terrace, to which you are allowed access, the view is remarkable. The town lies below you, and though not sufficiently elevated to command it, you see before you a grouping of ancient houses and gabled roofs, which have quite a mediæval look about them. The towers and steeples of Caen rise on all sides, conspicuous amongst all the beautiful spire of St. Peter's.

But one of the best views is to be obtained in the grounds of the

hospital. When the lay-sister has conducted you through some of the wards: and you have admired the remarkable order and cleanliness of every room, the care taken of the sick, the contented expression of those not actually in pain; when you have noticed the quiet bearing of the nuns as they turn their faces to the wall during your presence, and you wonder whether they are old or young, beautiful or plain: the lay-sister conducts you into the grounds.

They are imposing; for they date from the time when the building was a nunnery inhabited by noble ladies. Tall trees cast their shadows athwart broad avenues; moving, restless shadows, as the wind and the sun glint and whisper through the leaves. You tread upon chequered lights and shades. To the right is a small labyrinth, and through its not very intricate windings the sister leads the way. The view from the summit is extensive. Caen lies before you at a little distance. Some of the churches stand out boldly, the steeples rising heavenwards. They are so numerous that you might call it a city of steeples or spires—has not Coventry received the same title?—but in Caen they are as diversified as numerous.

You see the Castle rising proudly, and even catch the sun glancing upon the steel bayonet of the rude sentry as he paces to and fro. You trace the windings of many a narrow, many an ancient street, some of which are dilapidated and dirty enough to daunt even an antiquarian. You catch a glimpse of the church of St. Nicholas—a church which had interested us so much before we looked upon it from the maze of the Hôtel Dieu.

It was not far from the Abbaye aux Hommes. The gates were open and we had entered only an hour ago. It is now desecrated, and converted into a hay-store for the cavalry, and the effect was curious. Beautiful pillars and arches were half buried, half lost in hay. The aisles were full of it. Everything was crumbling to decay. Some of the pillars were broken and the capitals lay where they had fallen. In the space surrounding the church, hay carts reposed upon their shafts, and before the fine west doorway, also crumbling and dilapidated, the artist from the Hôtel Royale was painfully seated upon an inverted tub, almost as ruined as the church itself, diligently sketching.

We had thoroughly enjoyed the visit, and lingered and gazed, until H. C., attacked by a fit of sneezing, declared himself in danger of catching hay-fever.

All this we recalled from the maze, and our very pretty and interesting lay-sister pointed out many spots which were as yet unknown to us, whilst she talked very pleasantly, and was evidently much taken with H. C. It was of course mutual, and presently he put a question to her which I feared bordered on indiscretion.

"Do you intend to take the veil?" he asked, a very tender light in his eyes and a certain anxiety in his tones.

"Oh, no," she laughed. "It is not my vocation. I could never live the life. But why do you ask, monsieur?"

H. C. looked relieved. "I thought it would be a pity," he replied. "You are too good to waste your life as a nun. You ought to go out into the world and marry, and be very happy, and make some good fellow very happy also."

The sister blushed at this unexpected compliment, and I began to think it was time we moved on.

"The nuns do not waste their lives," she said, half laughing, half in reproof. "They are good and holy women; in some cases too good for this world. If I were as good, perhaps I too could become cloistered; as it is, I know I should regret it. But as to marriage" —she blushed and laughed again—"I never think of that either. I don't intend to marry. Married people are always full of cares and worry; and husbands and wives get tired of each other. Oh, it is not at all romantic. I have never yet seen anyone that I could fall in love with."

"Not one?" murmured H. C. "Do you not believe in love at first sight?"

She spoke in broken English, with the prettiest accent possible. She was pale and dainty and refined-looking; moved softly and gracefully as her feet lightly trod the ground; in her neat and becoming lay-sister's dress, the clear white cap set well upon her head, the long thin lappets falling behind, she looked very interesting. It was impossible for anyone so susceptible as H. C. to escape; and there was really some excuse for him. Only, he is as inconstant as susceptible, and is no sooner "off with the old love than he is on with the new."

Below ran the river. We could trace the outline of the harbour, with its little forest of masts, a few vessels moving to and fro. In the distance one saw the confluence of the streams, and yet further away the broad sea, on which the sun shimmered and glanced.

Near the canal pathway was the *Maison des Gendarmes*, a curious old tower, built in the reign of Louis XII. It looks as though it might once have formed part of a fortress, with its battlemented walls and towers, but was built by Gerard de Nollent as a mere civil residence. This tower is all that remains of the structure, but its outlines may be gathered. The enclosure forms nothing but an untidy fold-yard, strewed with straw, through which cattle wend their weary way to and from their stables.

The tower takes its name from two armed men in stone ornamenting the summit. Until late years it was possible to mount to the platform, and look down upon the world from this little elevation; but the stone stairs have crumbled and fallen, and the rickety old doorway is wisely kept locked. The walls of the tower are curiously decorated with medallions: the heads of emperors, etc.; and a fine grated window is still in good preservation. It is a singular and interesting monument. Before it runs the canal, with its quiet banks and whispering trees, and the passing boats form almost all the life and movement upon which those stone figures now gaze. For the

glory of the place has departed, and on its lintels you may read the sad word Ichabod. He who raised the building lies low, motionless as his stone effigies.

These details we had remarked a few hours ago, when we had visited the tower; they were not to be seen from the maze. But we could trace the outlines, and follow the windings of the river far down the land, until all was lost in a general effect of distant sea.

The view was striking, and H. C. would have gone on contemplating it for any length of time, though its attractive feature to him was near at hand, not remote; but the conversation was growing personal and dangerous, and I marched him off in the very middle of a sentence in which he was asking the sister whether she was fond of poetry. It was long before he forgave me; for quite two hours he put on a melancholy air; and once, when I asked whether we should visit a certain spot before or after dinner, all the answer I received was a deep-drawn sigh and a murmured, "Quite too charming."

But it is more the surroundings of Caen than Caen itself that I would bring before you to-day. For Caen has many excursions, and a week or two might profitably be spent in taking them; making Caen your head-quarters, and coming back at night to the atmosphere of ancient monasteries and beautiful churches, and all the charm of gabled houses, and high, red-tiled roofs, with their dormer windows; to say nothing of the merits of the Hôtel de la Place Royale. It is at night, too, that these ancient houses and churches are especially interesting; when the moon rises, round as a shield, and throws her silvery light upon a sleeping world, revealing all outlines with such eerie and quaint effect.

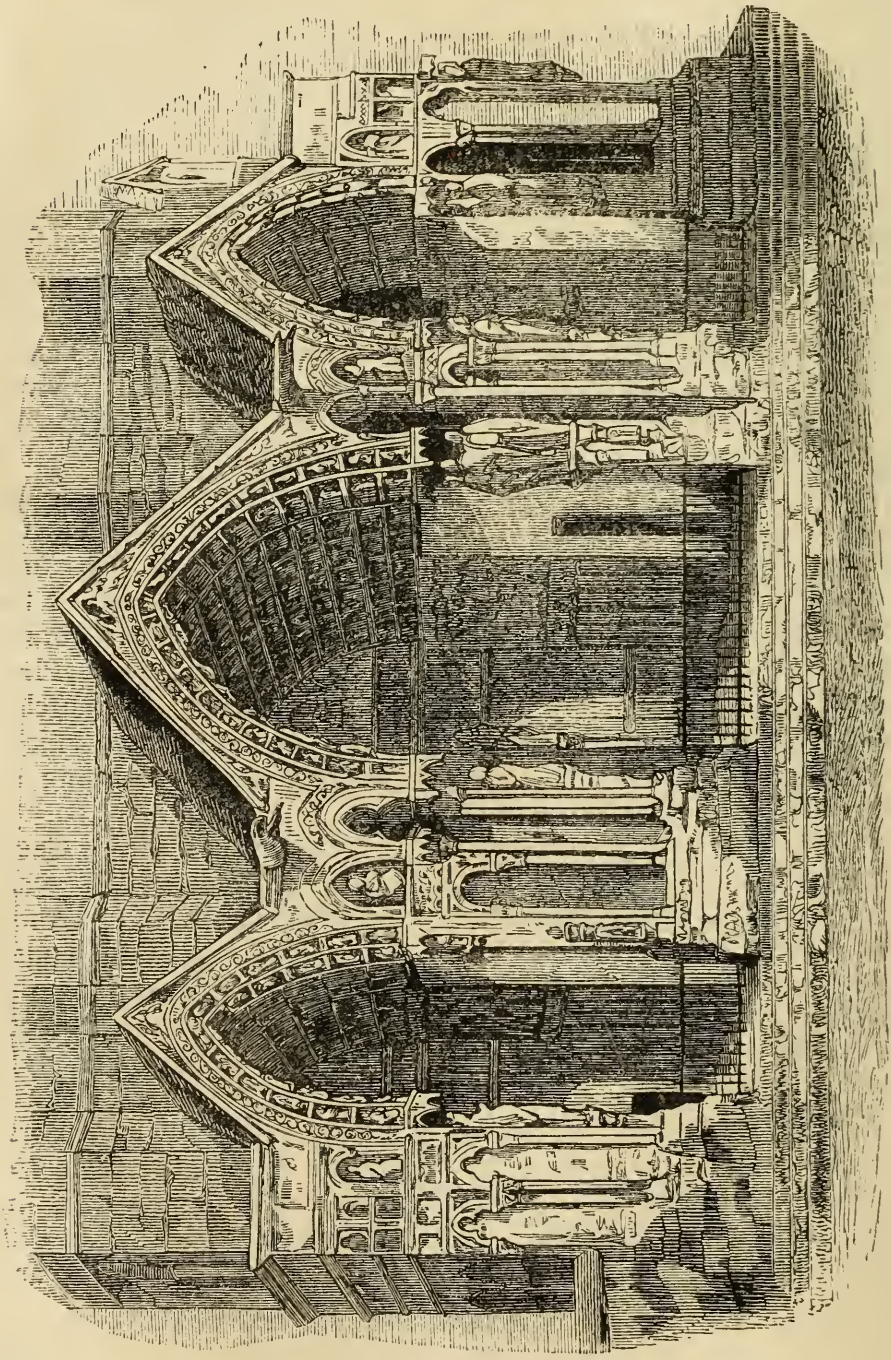
We were fortunate in meeting with a wonderful driver in Caen. We had never seen his like before, and never shall again. There are certain things and people that cannot repeat themselves; and he was one of them. Like the mould in which a genius is cast by nature, its purpose served, the form is shattered for ever. This man was indeed like Jehu, and drove furiously. His victoria was modest, but the horse, like the driver, was matchless. The man was quite aware of the fact and very proud of it.

"Would you believe," he said, "that this wonderful little horse was condemned? He was ill, and supposed to be quite done for. But I saw his merits, and persuaded the *patron* to buy him—he secured him for an old song. Since then he has earned his skin stuffed full of gold. He will run for ten hours like lightning and never turn a hair."

All he said was verified. We left one morning to visit the Abbaye d'Ardennes. He tore down the streets in a way that alarmed us, but which the people of Caen seemed accustomed to, for they took it as a matter of course. We were soon on the outskirts of the town, had passed the canal and the locks, and turned into a country road. The trees seemed to fly past us; the horse wanted neither whip nor

urging. All the driver had to do was to sit on his box and hold the reins, and occasionally check the ardour of the little animal.

The flat country was pretty and fertile, without possessing strongly-

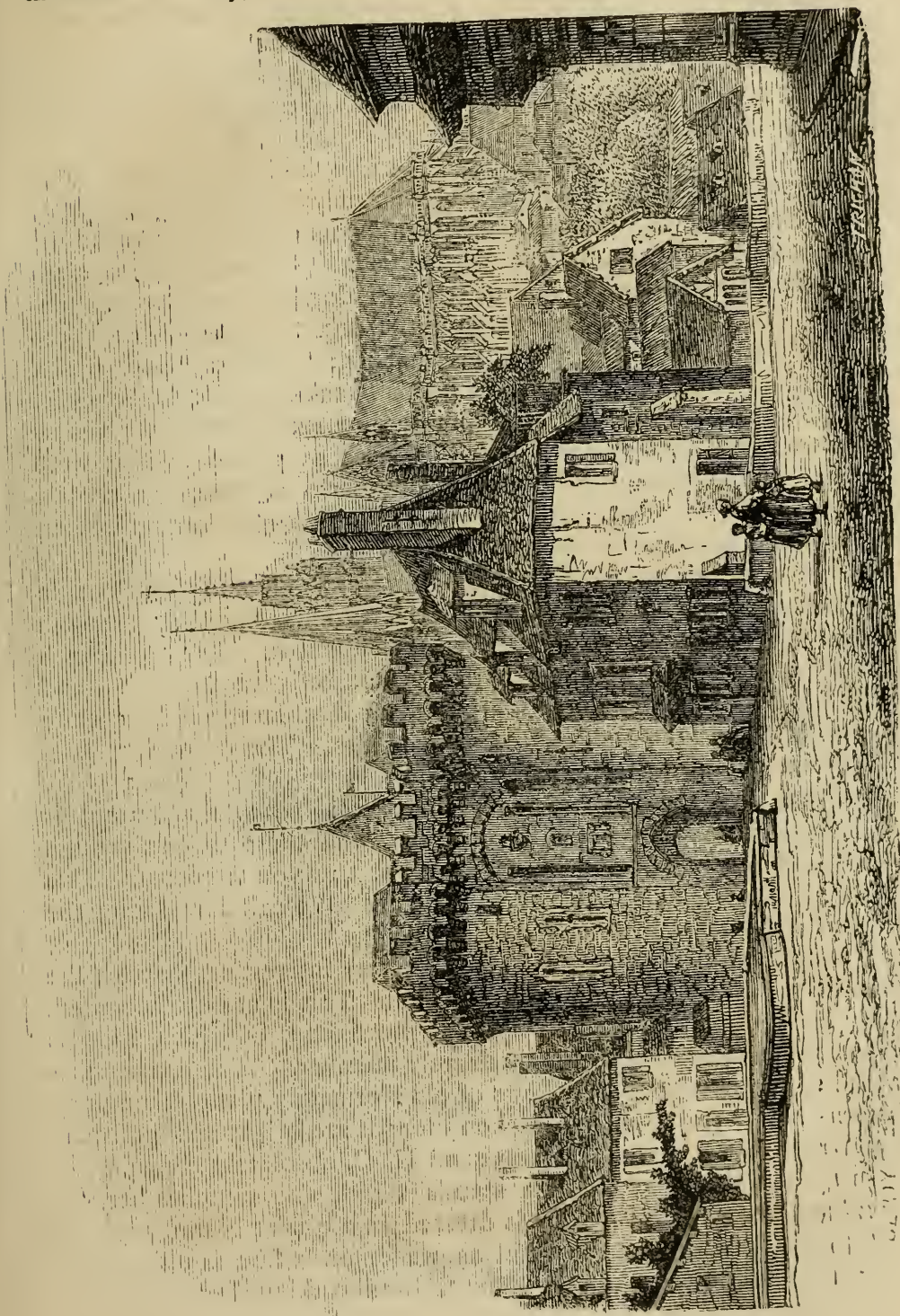


West Doorway of Chartres Cathedral.

marked features. We travelled at such speed that before long we found ourselves at the old Abbey, well rewarded for our pains.

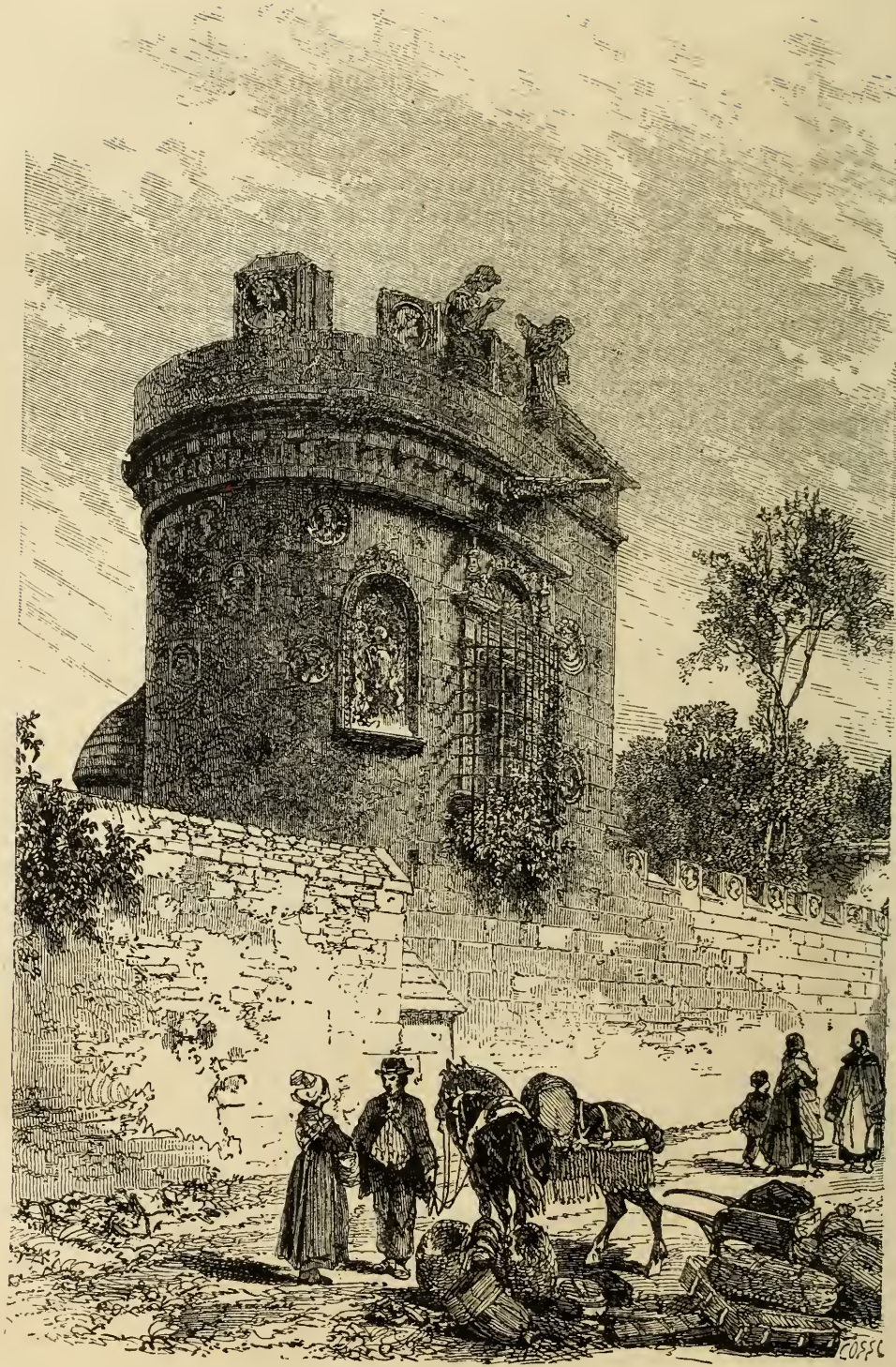
It is now nothing but a farm. The monastery buildings have been turned into a dwelling-house, and the church itself is used as a

barn and hay-store. The building is gothic, and dates back to the thirteenth century, with fourteenth century portals.



PORTE GUILLAUME, CHARTRES.

The whole forms a very striking and beautiful picture, and the air of partial ruin about it is very effective. The outlines and proportions of the church are extremely fine. The farm buildings are low,



TOUR DES GENDARMES.

COURTYARD IN THE HOUSE OF CHARLOTTE CORDAY, CAEN.

Here our driver announced that, with our permission, he should put up for an hour, to rest his horse: a well-earned reward. We were to meet again at the chief, possibly the only hotel in the place, and he departed in high spirits for the delectation of his fiery untamed steed —and for his own.

To begin with, we found a remarkable and interesting church. Of this we had had no notice, and it came upon us as an agreeable surprise. Perhaps the driver was of those to whom architecture does not appeal, and who have yet to learn reverence and admiration for ecclesiastical buildings. There are too many in France to whom the very word church, the very thought of religion, act as defiance to his Holiness the Pope, a red rag to a bull, or a wrong quantity to a scholar.

This church though small, was pure Norman. Encrusted in the wall of the sanctuary were the tombs of Antoine III. of Sillens, and of Antoinette II.; and beneath the church were vaults containing many fragments of tombs still more ancient and interesting.

Near the church we turned in at a small iron gateway, which admitted one to a short, unpretending, not especially well-kept avenue, yet with a suspicion of wildness about it that was very picturesque. At the end, the avenue opened out upon a group of trees and shrubs, and a broad lawn. Beyond this rose the stately château: a strange mixture of the modern and the ancient, the present and the past.

Seldom had we seen anything more beautiful and striking. In spite of some alterations, the modern hand had not in any way spoilt the general effect of the whole. The walls were grey with age and stained with the lichen growth of centuries. The architecture was of different periods spreading over four hundred years, the earliest dating from the twelfth century. Two remarkable round towers rose massively and majestically, and a third, of later date, towered above them. The windows, of various dates, and placed eccentrically, were very picturesque.

We gazed in wonder, thinking that to have missed this would have been to lose one of Normandy's choicest relics of antiquity. Suddenly, two ladies appeared at one of the windows and leaned out. They were dressed in the fashion of the day, and looked in strange contrast, almost out of harmony, with the ancient building they inhabited. A singular picture they made, set in the framework of the old window, its casement decorated with flowers and drooping creepers. Rather would we have seen apparitions dressed in sacques, or in ruff and farthingale, hooped skirts and high headdresses. Or even a quaint Norman costume of the present day would have been acceptable.

Then one of the ladies retired, and we heard a bell ring, and a distant voice screamed "Charlotte!" in a way that rather disturbed the solemn dignity and repose of this ancient building. We wondered whether it was Werner's Charlotte that was being apostro-

phised, and whether a ghost would shortly appear upon the scene. It was venerable enough for any number of ghosts; one of those buildings that are incomplete without its traditional apparition.

"Charlotte" appeared, not at all in the form of she who was wont to cut bread and butter. A decent, middle-aged woman, in ordinary servant's dress, who bade us welcome, and before we had left confided to us the whole history of the place, including her own domestic joys and sorrows. How she was the gardener's wife and had an excellent husband, as husbands went; and how they had one son in whom they were bound up heart and soul. He had never left her apron strings all the days of his life until three months ago, when it was necessary for him to go out in the world to earn his living. So they had apprenticed him to a haberdasher in Bayeux, and they hoped that he would do well and rise in the future. There was his little bed in the corner—pointing to one partly hidden by a screen—he had never even slept out of their room; and now she couldn't herself sleep at night for the emptiness. But, dame! the years will pass, and boys grow into young men, and they couldn't keep them for ever.

All this was said towards the conclusion of our visit, when she had taken us into her little sanctum, to show us photographs which she sold at a certain profit. It was narrated with many sighs and tears, and in tremulous tones; and we wondered whether her boy—her cher Ernest—sufficiently repaid all this wonderful anxiety and love. Probably, for she seemed to think him only "a little lower than the angels;" and if the French youths have no other virtue, they certainly possess that of great reverence and affection for their parents.

But before all this, Charlotte approached and bade us welcome.

We crossed the lawn under the fire of bright eyes from the window above, in no way disconcerted by our presence. A fine Norman archway led into a huge cave or cellar, with magnificent points about it, and every trace of antiquity. An enormous fire-place stood in the corner, at which an ox might have been roasted. It was all given up to modern uses, and casks of cider lay about, and a small braize fire was burning in a small modern stove. The room was partly used as a kitchen, and a Normandy maiden—possibly a second Charlotte—was, not cutting bread and butter, but—oh! that I should have to tell the truth and introduce so vulgar an element into all this refinement of architecture and antiquity—peeling onions. Alas! those fair ladies upstairs probably did not draw the line at onions; garlic was no doubt introduced into the mysteries of the table.

A winding staircase led to the rooms above, only one or two of which were shown. One room, circular in form and quaintly furnished, charmed us. You looked out upon the world through mullioned windows with deep embrasures, and over a small ancient fire-place were the arms of a long past owner.

For this Château de Creully has had many owners, and gone through strange vicissitudes. In point of prestige it has fallen in its old age. It was once one of the most important fortresses in Calvados, has seen martial pageants, much military rule and authority. Its courtyard echoed with the clanking of armour, and the flashing of swords in the sunlight was reflected upon its walls.

Belonging originally to Robert of Gloucester, natural son of Henry I., it changed possessors with the passing ages. At the last revolution it was in the possession of Caen, but unoccupied, neglected and forlorn, though it was for sale no one would buy it. At last an enterprising lady of the honest bourgeoisie of Caen made a ridiculously low offer for it—all this we learned from our excellent driver—something like a thousand pounds; and to her surprise, and no doubt delight, it was accepted: a rare property passed into her possession, and that of her heirs. Probably to-day they have become counts and barons, and write the magic "de" to their names.

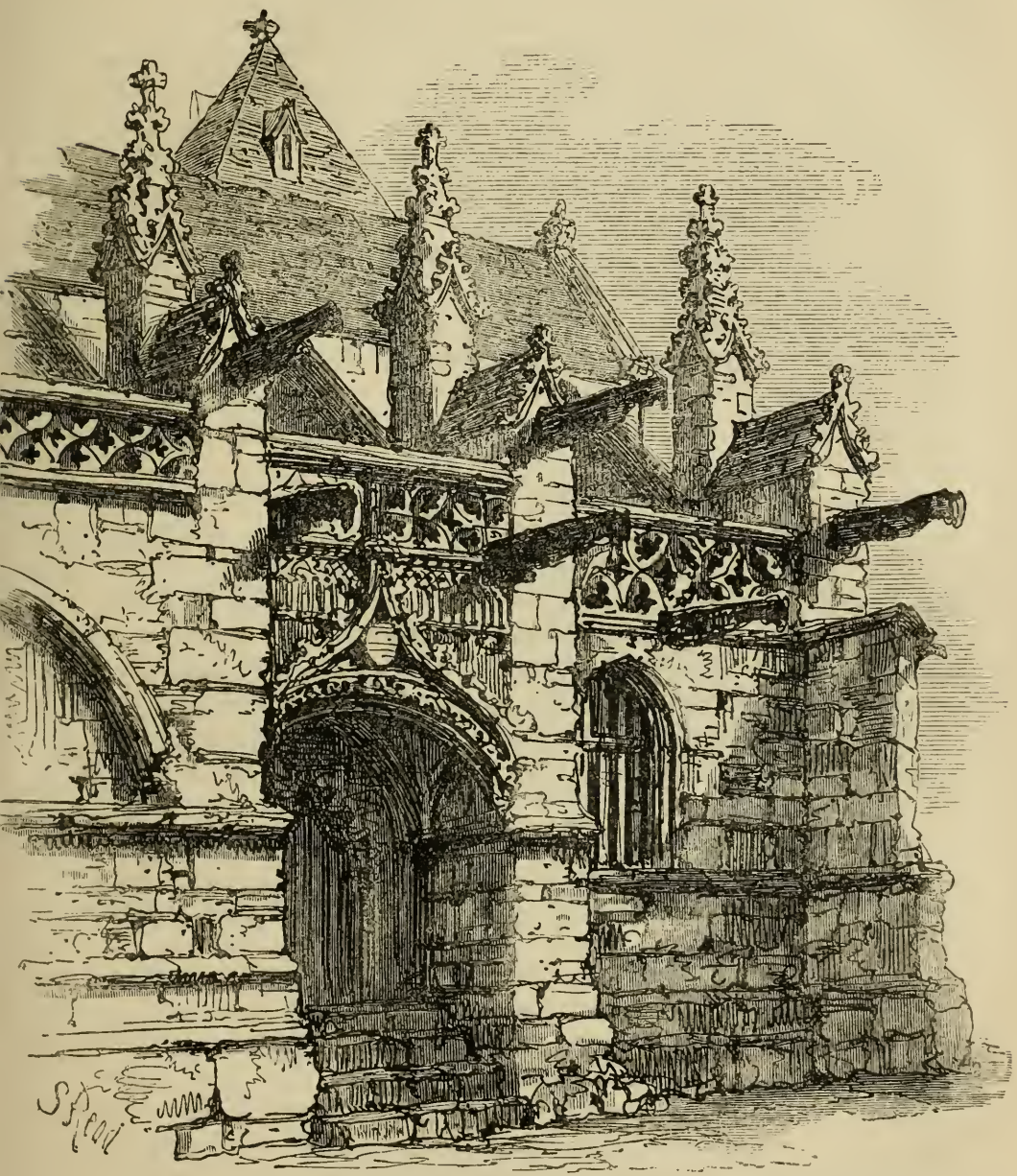
From the roof we gazed upon all the extent of territory; not wide, but beautiful. In the adjoining park, rich in trees and shady avenues, a stream for ever runs with a musical sound. There were fair pastures beyond, where the "horned cattle" were quietly grazing, and Charlotte occasionally goes a-milking; "just to keep her hand in, and to remind her of her young days when she was a happy dairymaid and knew nothing of trouble." The houses of the little town of Creully were just visible; and their red roofs appeared and disappeared through the trees as the wind swayed the branches to and fro. Beyond was the valley of the Seulles; and in the distance, if a winding road had not concealed them, the stately spires of Bayeux Cathedral might have been seen rising towards cloudland.

We lingered long about this beautiful château. H. C. lamented his limitation of power, which prevented him from transporting it bodily to England, by magic word or wand, and exchanging it for his unpretending shooting-box in the wilds of ——, where on the one hand you may watch the far-off sea breaking as it were upon the horizon, and on the other you inhale the scent of endless moors on which the grouse run to and fro and have a very happy time of it until, year after year, the ever-rolling stream brings round the twelfth of August.

But we had to leave at last. We could not take up our abode at the old and lonely château, and there was no magician's wand to transport us over land and sea. We gave it a last, long, very long lingering gaze from the lawn, and thought we had seldom found a more beautiful picture. The windows were all untenanted; the ladies had disappeared. H. C., who in appearance would pass very well for a Spanish troubadour, wished to give them an impromptu serenade by way of farewell—he is rather good at improvising; but with all his virtues, his voice, when raised in song, very much resembles a barrel-organ all out of time and tune; and the per-

formance would have been a base return for the civility shown us. So we departed in silence.

As we passed up the avenue, a sort of French dogcart met us. It contained the fortunate owner of this fair domain, returning from the



CHURCH OF ST. GILLES, CAEN.

"chasse." But the French chasse is a curious thing; a sort of trifling with edged tools in a drawing-room attire; a delicate handling of guns, an embroidered game bag, and a shooting at small birds: all very much opposed to the Englishman's ideas of sport.

Our hour was long over, and our driver was at the appointed place,

harnessed and waiting. We gave him every credit for having brought us to Creully, and set off on the homeward journey without further delay.

We had to return the same way; there was no possibility of varying the route without taking an immense round, and for this the day was too far advanced. The sleepy village was deserted as ever; but the horse was still working the treadmill with the same admirable resignation. We rattled down lanes and roads, and flew past trees and hedges. We left the Abbaye d'Ardennes to our right, but did not again enter its portals. The deep baying of Tiger echoed in the distance; evidently he heard us, knew well enough that there was only one descendant of Jehu in Caen to drive furiously, and that, to-day at least, he belonged to "those Englishmen." The towers and steeples, and the smoke of Caen soon rose into evidence; and before long, we found ourselves received with effusion by our landlord, who, at the moment, happened to be taking the air at his own hospitable and capacious doorway.

Once more we put our driver's powers to the test, and found him not wanting.

It was the next day, and a fête day. Everyone was dressed in his Sunday's best, and there was a general air of gaiety and festivity about place and people. It is astonishing how easily the French throw into themselves and their surroundings, the very air they breathe, a spirit of light-heartedness and harmless amusement. On their fête days there is a reality about their pleasures which makes itself felt with a strong assertion : it is part and parcel of their nature, an article of their religion; an hereditary gift; and it sits upon them so naturally that it exhilarates all who look on from an outer circle.

Our driver was also in his best, and pointed proudly to his little horse. "Messieurs saw how he went yesterday, and how he looks to-day," he remarked. "None the worse for his twenty miles an hour."

All quite true. The horse was fresh and in good condition; his eye was bright, and he tossed his head and shook his mane, and did his best to tell us that he was ready to do as much to-day as he had done yesterday. In point of fact he did a good deal more.

The driver mounted his box, our landlord bowed us away from the porte cochère, and we started on our long drive.

To-day we were not going to see any ruined abbeys or antiquated châteaux. Our journey would lead us chiefly to what is older than all these, yet ever new—the glorious sea.

We rattled through the streets of Caen, and caught many a glimpse of old houses up dark and narrow turnings. Soon we had left the town behind us, and commenced a lovely drive by the side of the water. It was one of those perfect days that come to us at rare intervals; once in two or three years, perhaps; days that we could

never forget though we lived a century after ; for they are celestial, and heaven seems very close to us. But we pay dearly for them, for they are almost always succeeded by days that are dark, gloomy and depressing.

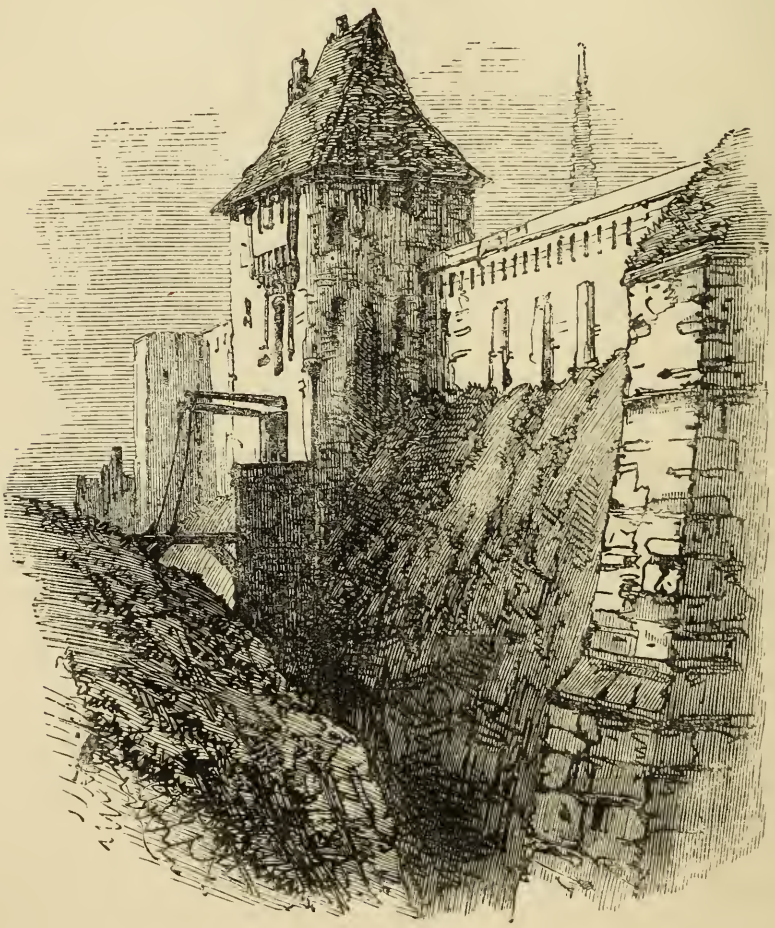
Such a day was this. Everyone caught the infection, and life seemed a very bright and glorious thing. As we sped along the banks of the river Orne, the landscape formed a glowing picture. The trees waved and rustled in the breeze and threw their reflection upon the surface of the water, which equally reflected the far-off blue of the sky. We passed through villages, and found one or two interesting old Norman churches on our way. In one, old and primitive, where the pillars and arches were pure Norman, a small congregation of children was in charge of nuns, who looked very picturesque in their dress and bent over their chairs in what H. C. called the grace of perfect posture. The sun glinted through trellised windows, and fell upon the pavement and across the pillars in chequered lights. The altar was illuminated by a few candles, and a priest was going through the service with the help of two or three small acolytes. As we looked, they suddenly struck up a hymn to the air of "See the Conquering Hero Comes!" How this had travelled so far from England was a mystery ; and whether they supposed it to be something out of an oratorio we did not know. When all was over, the children filed out, the nuns followed, and they flitted down a small street into obscurity. We saw them no more.

We went our way, and reached the small artificial port of Ouisterham, at the mouth of the Orne. Up here come all vessels proceeding to Caen ; and steamers from Hâvre and other places ply to and fro. It was a very lovely picture and came upon us with a surprise. The locks were well constructed, and beyond them two short piers stretched out to the sea. The land circled round in a bay, the farthest visible point leading to Hâvre. The shore was low and flat, with stretches of white glistening sand bordered by green banks, that gave it all a clean and bright appearance. Behind rose the tower of the village church, built in the Romanesque style. Scarcely anyone was visible. There was an air of singular calmness and repose about the place, and we both longed to come and pass days here, and revel in the seclusion, the lovely and primitive harbour, and the glorious sea, which broke upon the shore with gentle murmur.

A fishing smack lying high and dry upon the sand, a few men repairing her ; a couple of fishwomen looking on in picturesque attire —these formed the only animated group in the landscape. With this exception, the place seemed deserted : we had the piers to ourselves ; far down the beach, as far as the eye could reach, there was no sign of life or human habitation. I don't know whether it was the rare and exceptional day, or whether there was some singular charm in the place itself, but few spots have impressed us more than

this little harbour on the sea-coast; this mouth of the Orne, which leads up to the port of Caen. The sea itself was in its calmest, sleepiest, loveliest mood; the sun flashed and gleamed upon it in countless jewels; the deep blue changed to the most transparent aqua-marine as it broke over the white sands, and ebbed and flowed with the most musical of sounds. It was indeed music to listen to it: the music, not of the spheres, but of the elements.

A small boat made for the harbour, two fishermen presently



CASTLE DRAWBRIDGE.

landed, and one offered us the contents of his basket, whilst the other shouldered his huge nets and ran off like a lamplighter. Of course we could only decline the "caller herrin," or whatever they might be, and tell him that we were birds of passage, not birds of prey. It was all one. He went off in that happy and contented mood which is essentially the heritage of the French poor. If we did not buy, another would. They have a strong if superstitious faith, these fishermen; they live from hand to mouth, and trust for their daily bread; are provident; and so there is always the handful of meal in the barrel and a little oil in the cruse.

We lingered so long that our little horse waxed impatient; but it was difficult to leave this earthly paradise. The way along the coast would have been monotonous but for the all-sufficient and magnificent sea. Presently, however, we came to a succession of small and curious watering-places. The houses are fantastically built, often within a few feet of the water, and people undress in them and gracefully trip down for their bathe. When they have had enough of paddling and floating, dancing quadrilles, and generally disporting themselves, in the light and airy fashion of the French, they trip back again—not quite so gracefully.

We passed quickly through these settlements, and made our last halt at Luc-sur-Mer, a small but frequented watering-place; and, we thought, without exception the ugliest and dreariest ever seen. As it was a religious fête day no one was bathing; but everyone was abroad in his best, and the place looked almost animated. The sands were wide, fine and firm, and very flat. A boat was lying upon them, high and dry, and near it were two carts piled with seaweed, ready to be taken away on the morrow. They formed a wonderful picture outlined by the sun, which was beginning to decline and cast long shadows. On the terrace above the shore booths were erected, but no one seemed buying or selling. As for ourselves, we were the observed of all observers, and evidently excited wonder, though we could not tell how far it was mixed with admiration.

Our driver had put up at an old-fashioned-looking inn, declaring that his horse must have an hour's refreshment. We gave him good measure, and at the end of an hour and a half "went for him." He was nowhere to be found. The victoria was reposing in the yard, the horse refreshing in the stables; but the driver had disappeared. Great bells were rung, with noise enough to wake the Seven Sleepers, and ostlers were sent flying in all directions. At length he appeared, looking very conscious. We asked no questions; discretion is the better part of valour, we lately observed; and before long we were dashing through the streets of Luc in a manner that brought people rushing pale-faced to their doors, and no doubt sent many an evil prophecy after us. But they reckoned without their host: we did not, and no harm came to us.

On our way back we passed through Douvres, a quaint village, with small substantial houses, much decorated with flowers; and people who lounged about, and men who made rude remarks—a rare experience this. We halted at the church of La Délivrande, a small Norman building, where the Norman fishermen have prayed for success and safety for eight hundred years; invoking the patronage of their saints and burning propitiatory candles. It is decorated with an image of the Virgin, dug up in the days of Henry I., by, says the legend, the agency of a lamb, who scratched up the earth over it until it was discovered. The image is said to perform miracles, and has at all times been the object of extensive pilgrimages.

There is a convent close by, where, during the bathing season, ladies may go and board. But the nuns are not given to levity and the frivolous pleasures of the world, and it can scarcely be an abode of gaiety and animation.

The shadows of night were falling as we once more caught sight of the towers and steeples of Caen. They had quite fallen before we reached the old town, which was then only to be distinguished by its lights, and a clashing of bells that rang out upon the night air as we entered within its boundaries.

It was a welcome sound. We had been out the whole day, and were quite ready to grace the festive board of the Hôtel Royale. As for our little horse, it is no exaggeration to say that he seemed disposed to go over the ground a second time. His powers were inexhaustible: ours were not, and we were glad to disappear within the warmth and light of the inn.

Table d'hôte had long begun; the noisier group at the farther end had become very convivial, and our artist was looking very resigned; but our places had been reserved, and the waiter wished us *Bon appétit* as he brought in the *potage*, and hoped we had had a pleasant day. Our head waiter was missing, and we were told that he had gone up to Paris for the day by an excursion train, to see the Exhibition and the Eiffel Tower. The next morning he reappeared, pale and sleepy. The wonders of the Eiffel Tower had been too much for him. He had ascended as far as the first stage, his head had failed him, and he had very promptly to come down to earth. As for the Exhibition, it was all a jumble and a whirl; he did not think his brain would ever get right again.

We went out after dinner, that night of a memorable day, and watched the stars flashing in the silent heavens, and listened to the ringing of the curfew, and wandered in dreams to the far-off times when the curfew was first rung, and people rose with the lark and went to bed with the sun.

We went down the quiet street containing Charlotte Corday's house, and almost fancied we saw the ghost of a little deformed woman turn silently from the doorway, and begin her pilgrimage to the great capital. We saw the small determined hand strike home the dagger, the life-blood flow and turn the water to crimson, and the tyrant feel his last moments at hand—with what terrible emotions? We saw the unfortunate Charlotte Corday mount the scaffold in expiation of her heroic deed, a true martyr to her righteous cause; we saw the inhuman executioner dastardly strike the head as it rolled into the sawdust; saw the blush which is said to have risen to the cheek in reproof of the deed, and which all Paris believed in at the time: and under the influence of these ghostly visions, before us also, as in a panorama, passed all the horrors of that bygone revolution in grim and ghastly array.

Shuffling down another quiet street, we saw the figure of Beau

Brummell, who passed the later years of his life in Caen, a mere wreck of his former self, yet doing his best to keep up his bygone reputation by an occasional display of frills, laces and gold-headed canes. But the eye had lost its sparkle, the mind was weakening, and before long we see him conveyed to the *Hospice du Bon Secours*, set apart for the insane, where he ends his days.

Insensibly we presently found ourselves in front of the Abbaye aux Dames—drawn to it as the magnet attracts the needle. It looked solemn and silent and beautiful, full of peace and repose, in the darkness of night. Lights gleamed from the windows of the hospital beyond; the nuns were at their works of mercy; tending the sick, alleviating pain and suffering; the great gates were closed; the avenues were deserted and gloomy; the trees were full of darkness and seemed whispering mighty secrets to each other, as they bowed before the wind. Houses were being closed, lights disappeared: it was soon a sleeping world.

We, too, sought our couches; and in dreams, one of us, at least, lived over again the events of the past day, heard the waters of the sea breaking gently upon the shore; whilst the air seemed full of rainbow hues and the melody of birds; and, still in dreams, there was a sound as of the fluttering and folding of angels' wings: ministers charged with vials, and pouring life and health upon all; a wealth of warmth and sunshine, of happiness and rapture; and above the music of birds and the fluttering of wings, a voice seemed to ring through all the glorious ether; the song was a song of Praise, and a countless multitude joined in an everlasting chorus. And the burden of the song was this:

THOU OPENEST THINE HAND, AND FILLEST ALL THINGS LIVING WITH PLENTEOUSNESS.

THE BROTHERS.

By E. Chilton.

I.

THEY were brothers. You would not have guessed it, to look at them. The elder was tall and strongly built, with dark hair, bright eyes and a bronzed skin. The younger, undersized, even for his age—and his age was nine—fair and pale, with a high head and a broad forehead: "a clever-looking little chap," people said of him. About the elder, they said what a fine young fellow!—just that and nothing more.

Already the nine-year-old boy was full of shrewd thoughts and methodical ways. His elder, twice that age, did not know what shrewdness meant. As to method—is the wind methodical? or, granted that point, can method be expected from a reed whose will is the wind's will? But this youth was nevertheless a hero to the little one, whose courage was less precocious than his intellect; and who found his big brother a protector in many a storm.

It was a summer's evening, and the younger boy was coming home from school. His thin cheeks had an unwonted flush; his eyes were shining. He had yesterday become the proud possessor of a gold watch: in which his "tips" for the last two years—laid up by his own forethought in the Savings Bank—had been invested. As he walked home, satchel at back, through the crowded streets, he constantly took out his watch to examine the time; keeping it on each occasion rather longer in view than was necessary, and casting a conscious glance around him in the hope that the passer-by might observe it. Suddenly, turning a corner, he ran against his foe, Big Kelly.

Big Kelly was a dunce and a tyrant, as tall and more burly than the elder brother, but still at school the terror of the lower forms. Against this old-fashioned and clever child he nourished a special grudge; which, greatly to the boy's alarm, he lost no occasion of practically indulging.

"What's that, you young reprobate? Been pocket-picking? Hand over, or I'll set the police on you."

"Don't! Don't! It's my watch—my new watch! I saved up my money to buy it."

"Don't believe you. You've been and prigged it;" and the bully, who had now forcibly possessed himself of the watch, dangled it up and down by its slender guard, to the intense misery of its owner.

"Off with you! Off with you! Police! Police!" cried Big Kelly, seizing the child by the collar, and setting off to run, the watch swinging from one hand, his victim fast in the other.

By and bye, they reached the bridge. The setting sun was casting a glow upon the water. Big Kelly, pausing at the parapet to take breath, amused himself by twirling the watch rapidly round and round in the red light, its golden rim a circlet of sparkles.

Suddenly—was it by accident? Big Kelly subsequently affirmed the same—the treasure, so long hoped for, had vanished. The strong current below the arches of the bridge had pounced upon it, swept it round and round and away on with the rushing river; in another instant it had sunk, and the current whirled over its grave.

An hour later the elder brother, running upstairs three steps at a time, was struck by a little moaning cry, as of some small animal in pain. He pushed open the door through which it came, and had nearly stumbled over a sobbing heap prostrate on the floor.

"Why, Jem, my little chap! what is it? Big Kelly again? What has he done? Never mind, leave him to me."

The strong young fellow had lifted the boy into his arms. He sobbed out all his woe on that friendly breast.

One more hour had gone by. Jem was in bed; he had crept there supperless, exhausted by weeping. Rolf, the elder brother, had not yet returned from his mission of righteous retribution. The child had infinite confidence in his brother's prowess; he would be avenged; he knew Big Kelly would suffer; but the watch—that orb of delight! Was it for this that he had schemed and saved?—denied himself sweets and toys, and his brother birthday presents? How happy he had been last night at this time!—the watch had just been bought—he was holding it to his ear to hear its even tick—he was hanging it carefully upon its hook in the watch case Rolf had given to him. The first thing in the morning he had thought of it—wondered if it were a dream—and there it had been, ticking at his side!

"Jem, old fellow! Here, wake up."

The elder brother had returned. He sat down upon the bed, and laid his hand on the fair head half muffled in the counterpane.

"Jem! I've thrashed Big Kelly. You won't see him at school to-morrow; or if you do, just look at his eye. It's got raw beef on it this moment, or I'm much mistaken. Jem!"

"Yes."

"Why, what a 'yes!' It sounds all down among the dead men! Where's your ear? That's right! Now you listen!"

His face still buried, Jem obeyed, started wildly, sprang up in the bed.

"My watch! My watch! And it's dry! How did you get it? How did you get it?"

"Never mind how. I've a particular friend, a merman, down in the river. Now take care of it, and I don't think you need be afraid any more of Big Kelly. When he wants to know the time, you can show it to him."

"But it's got a different chain—a gold chain! It's a nicer watch than the other. You've bought it me—Rolf, you've bought it me!" He rapturously hugged his benefactor.

"But how did you manage?" he asked, a moment afterwards, with one of his shrewd glances. "You never save up your money, I know. And I thought you hadn't got any!"

"How did I manage it? Never mind! That's my affair! Now here are your clothes, old chap. Get up again, and come to your supper."

It was not until the following evening that the younger brother missed Morcar: Morcar, Rolf's dog, a grey staghound, faithful and beloved. A friend had long coveted him—and lately, being about to leave the city, had offered a high price for him to his master. But Rolf, though he wanted money—he was always in want of money—would not listen. Sell Morcar, the apple of his eye! he said.

"Rolf! It's not true?" cried Jem, running in from school.

"What's not true?" asked the elder brother.

"A fellow told me you'd sold Morcar to Brown."

"So I have. He'll be happier in the country. Don't remind me of it, old boy."

How hoarsely these last words were uttered! And why did Rolf stride so quickly out of the room?

For a long time it seemed strangely unnatural to meet Rolf out of doors without Morcar—or to find him sitting in the house, and no Morcar, nose on paws, beside his chair.

But Jem was only nine years old, and did not realise at first that Morcar's departure and the arrival of his second watch had been coincident events.

II.

THE tyranny of Big Kelly proved, after all, a fortunate circumstance for the younger brother. There was a bigger Kelly, who presently heard of the outrage committed by his son; who was very angry, with the kind of anger to be expected from Kelly's father—and who determined to make amends to little Jem. He was rich, and wished at first to present the boy with another watch set in diamonds; but finding that the elder brother had supplied the loss—"lucky young dog," said Bigger Kelly, "to have an elder brother who could afford it!"—he soothed himself by making much of the child.

A marvellously sharp child! in this way just what he had desired—ineffectually—his own son to be. The bigger Kelly, more and more, as years went on, admired his acuteness—even his tendency, never too obtrusive, to do the best possible for No. 1. In process of time he offered the boy a seat in his counting-house; for this bigger Kelly had made his large fortune in merchandise. Jem would make a fortune too, he prophesied; a helping hand from himself should not be wanting. Yes, it was a good stroke of fortune for Jem

when that twirling circlet flew into the river! And meanwhile the better watch, the price of Morcar, ticked always steadily in his pocket; and promised, as guaranteed, to last a lifetime.

The early home of the brothers was broken up. The elder had long gone forth into the world. The younger remained under the wing of the bigger Kelly. He was soon a nice-looking young man, his hair still fair and shining, his grey eyes keener than before, his expression still shrewd—but not unpleasantly so. He looked clever—and a gentleman: at five-and-twenty he had won the heart of Big Kelly's youngest sister, a sweet little "rosebud of a girl," her father's pride and darling. The bigger Kelly could deny her nothing, and he did not wonder at her fancy for talented young Jem. It showed her sense, he thought; for Jem was pushing on. His faculty for saving had not diminished itself; he had saved a good deal, and what he saved he could always, in some miraculous way, double and treble by his skill in the money market. His speculations were invariably lucky; the bigger Kelly would recount them, and chuckle over them, among his own contemporaries. The Rosebud had a nice little fortune of her own; but her father knew that it could not be placed in safer hands than Jem's. They were married and happily settled in a pretty house—not too large; and the ménage not extravagant to start with—not far from the town; and Jem went on diligently in his business, and prospered, growing richer every day.

Riches, even more than elsewhere, reigned paramount in that great city. Especially in the clique of the bigger Kelly, and soon of Jem, a man's banking account was the measure of his estimation. By degrees Jem became a little ashamed to mention his elder brother. For while the younger had grown richer, the elder had grown poorer. The parable of the Prodigal Son was in their cases reversed. Jem, the younger, had stayed and prospered in his native town; and Rolf had gone away to a distant county, and there had wasted his substance—not in riotous, but in careless living.

It was said, a page or two back, that Rolf was always in want of money. He always had been so; he was so still. Somehow money melted in his pockets. Friends were in need: Rolf's scanty purse was at their disposal; friends had turned up unexpectedly: Rolf must feast them; some gaiety, tempting but expensive, offered itself: Rolf and his belongings must share in it. His belongings, for Rolf, too, was married; he had been married a long while before Jem: and he had an only son, a beautiful and clever boy, who often reminded him—although Jem was never beautiful—of his younger brother.

His wife was beautiful, too—Rolf was ever an admirer of beauty. And she had been a petted child, cherished and idolised even more than the girl chosen by Jem, and in a household far more refined. She had grown up sheltered from every blast; then suddenly, her parents had died of some infectious illness—and she was left alone in this

hard world, and poor. What could Rolf—who already loved her passionately—do, but marry her forthwith? To the winds went prudence; they were soon happily settled—comforts, within their means and without their means, lavished about them, and Rolf his wife's slave and devotee.

She had no notion of the value of money; she had never learned it in her first luxurious home. She was very delicate, also; and Rolf could not bear that the wind should blow upon her. For himself, he was always hoping that better days would come. He worked as diligently as he knew how in his profession; was always kind, always generous, always impulsive, always imprudent and careless. After a while they had to move into poorer quarters—then into poorer still.

"I wonder," the elder brother thought sometimes, "if I could get help of any kind from Jem?"

He wrote to Jem once—feeling his way, for he was very proud—giving some hint of his affairs to that intent. But the younger brother's answer had a sharp tone in it—a tone of severity.

"I can't ask him for anything whatever," thought Rolf, as he read it; "after all, poor fellow, he has his way to work up—and he is nine years younger than I. It is I who should be helping him—foolish spendthrift that I am!"

For there had long been some three hundred miles between them, and the elder brother had no one to tell him of the extent of Jem's prosperity: which, indeed, Jem played his cards too well to reveal as yet fully to the world.

III.

"A GENTLEMAN to see you, sir, on business."

It was late at night. The younger brother, who had been married a year, was sitting alone, absorbed in papers, in his study. His wife had gone to a ball at the bigger Kelly's, whither Jem intended eventually to follow.

He rose as a tall figure, his hat drawn low on his brows, his face half muffled in a comforter, his coat collar high, was ushered into the room.

The servant closed the door, and departed. The visitor turned, carefully examining the handle. "Is it fast?" he said.

Then, as Jem, in astonishment, stared, he threw off his hat and wrappers, and with one hasty stride across the room, seized the younger brother's hands.

"Jem, old chap!" he said.

"Rolf!" said Jem, slowly. There was recognition in his glance—but no joy—not even pleasure. The momentary, impulsive joy in Rolf's eyes—the same kind eyes as of old—flashed back into darkness.

"What are you come about? Some trouble, I see," said Jem.

"Trouble, indeed; or should I come in this way, all this distance

after all these years? I won't keep you in suspense, Jem: I want your help. Yes, I am in awful trouble. If you will not help me, I shall be —— never mind where. But you will help me. Surely you will."

"Go on," said the younger brother, coldly.

"Jem, old fellow, I knew you had to fight your way. I've never asked you for money before—but I have wanted money dreadfully. Things have been getting worse and worse with me, Jem—I've been a fool, I know—but—if you can give me a fresh start now, you shall see—you shall see."

"Well, explain yourself. I can do nothing in the dark," said Jem. "I thought it was something of the kind, from the tone of your last letter. Here, sit down," and he pushed forward an easy-chair.

"I can't sit down—I can't rest till I know. I thought—oh, I thought there could be no doubt; but now —— Jem, it's worse than debt! I must make a clean breast of it—you are my only hope. I accepted a trusteeship—a friend of mine, going on a long voyage, left some money with me to invest for his children. Just after he went, I was hard driven—how hard, only God knows. My wife was ill—dying, I thought—there was a writ out against me. I couldn't tell where to turn—I borrowed that money. Jem, I only borrowed it—I have paid the interest, for the year since I had it, punctually. I meant to repay the principal as soon as I could. God knows I meant it."

"And, pray, how?"

The elder brother's eyes fell. His face was one living agony.

"How? How? I cannot tell how. But I meant it. I thought the means would come—I thought I would work harder than ever—I thought something might happen—or, if not, I might get you to lend it to me. And now—now, Jem—my friend is dead; his executors—strangers, hard men—have written to me—I have to produce the sum. If I cannot, I shall be in—in jail, before the week is out. My boy's name will be disgraced—and my wife will die. She can never live through it. Jem—my only resource—you are my only resource—my only resource."

He kept repeating these last words in a hurried murmur—walking to and fro, his hands clenched, looking, from time to time, in nervous desperation at his brother.

"What would you wish me to do?" said Jem.

"To refund the money—to lend it to me—your interest shall be sure. I will do anything—break stones on the road—to repay you."

"Breaking stones is not usually a lucrative profession," said the younger brother; "what is the sum?"

"Two thousand pounds. Jem, old fellow! have you forgotten what chums we were? Oh, help me, help me now—think of my wife—you have a wife of your own."

"My wife knows how to manage her money affairs. So long as

she lived, I should never, myself, be in the straits you speak of. The comparison will not hold. Your wife was supposed to be dying a hundred times before; why should she die now? But if she did die, you would probably, after a time, get on a great deal better. Forgive my plain speaking. I think, from the letter you wrote to me, describing her delicacy and her helplessness, that you owe much of your trouble to her."

"Say another syllable and I knock you down," returned Rolf.

Jem compressed his lips and was silent.

"Demon in my brother's form, will you lend me the money? I ask it once more, because I am forced to ask. If I cannot repay it, my son shall, when he is old enough. Will you lend it to save me from jail?—to save your own name, the same as mine?"

"I will not," said Jem, whom his brother's manner had now still further hardened: "I will not be an accomplice in crime. As you have sown, you must reap. Nor the name—I shall get over that: everyone who knows the facts will sympathize with me. I cannot afford to lose two thousand pounds."

For one moment Rolf stood still, with intense difficulty restraining himself. Then, mechanically, he resumed his hat and wraps. When Jem again looked round from his high-backed chair, his elder brother was gone.

IV.

"Is there nothing, positively nothing, to be done?" said the younger brother.

Five-and-twenty years had rolled away since that nocturnal visit; five-and-twenty years since the deplorable events which had speedily followed it, and in which everyone—everyone in his own circle—had, as he had prophesied, pitied him for his unfortunate connection with that fraudulent trustee whose improvidence had ended in ruin. Five-and-twenty years! and the once fair head of the little schoolboy was grey; but it was the same face, only harder and older; and the same keen eyes were fixed, with an expression now of careworn anxiety, upon the doctor.

"I will give ten thousand pounds to any man who can save her," he said, as the doctor, grave and meditative, stood silent.

"There is one man who might do it. Mind! I only say *might*. One man only in all Europe," said the doctor.

"And who is he? I will send for him this moment," said the younger brother, his hand upon the bell.

"Dr. Falkland, I mean. You know his name, of course. Yes, if we telegraph at once, it is just possible."

A telegraph form lay near; it was quickly filled in, the younger brother writing at railway speed:

"*Ten thousand pounds if you can save my child. Pray come quickly.*"

The telegram despatched, the doctor returned to the sick-room. The younger brother, too anxious to follow him, walked restlessly up and down. Presently the doctor was recalled in hot haste to the study. The younger brother stood white as death, a yellow paper in his hand.

"Doctor, he will not come."

"Will not come!" exclaimed the doctor. He snatched the telegram, and read:

"*You must excuse me. I cannot come to you.*"

"It is that he will not," repeated the younger brother. "'To *me*,' he says—he 'cannot come to *me*.' What have I done to offend him?"

"Nonsense," said the doctor, abruptly. "Give me another form."

He sat down himself, and wrote in his own name:

"*Pray come at once. A matter of life and death. She is his only daughter.*"

"There, I think you may rely upon him now," he said, as the messenger was despatched once more. "But it is strange. I cannot understand it."

He looked at the paper musingly.

"He is a rich man, this Falkland. He married an heiress—one of his patients—a millionaire's daughter. He is quite independent of his practice. Perhaps your message sounded too much like a bribe."

"I'll apologise when I see him," said the younger brother. But if he could have smiled when his only girl, his idol, lay at the point of death upstairs, he would have smiled at the notion of any man—millionaire or not—thinking lightly of ten thousand pounds.

Still, as the long hours rolled on, he paced up and down, up and down, his study floor. It was not the study in which his brother had visited him. That house of his early marriage days had long been discarded. This was a splendid room, richly furnished; there was nothing to recall that unpleasant interview; nothing except—he thought once, as he felt how terrible anxiety was, of his elder brother's anxiety that night. Yes, that must have been hard to bear, too! However disgraceful its causes, hard, no doubt.

He almost wished—but he must not think of that. It would unnerve him still more than he was unnerved already. By long custom he had acquired the art of banishing from his mind every circumstance of that painful night.

Now and then, as he waited, he visited his daughter's room. At the door, each time, he paused and listened, afraid to enter. What might he hear? What might he see? But each time she lay as before; prostrate, half-conscious, her fair young features of a strange, unearthly hue, her sweet lips colourless, half parted, her eyes half closed. Oh, how like death she looked! And yet she must not

die—she should not. He could not lose her—the one thing in this world which he loved more dearly than his money.

Her mother, his wife, sat beside the bed; his sons, fine young men, were also watching. He cared for them all; but not for all together as for this one—this girl, longed for through daughterless years, granted at last—and now—dying!

But no—no—she should not die. Ten thousand pounds! Let Dr. Falkland feign as he might. He would undoubtedly for ten thousand pounds do his best.

Day was breaking when the carriage rolled quickly to the door. The younger brother went out into the hall. He would have asked, "Is the doctor come?" but his lips clave together. He could only gaze in an agony of suspense, as the door was thrown open. Yes; he was come. The one man in Europe who could save her!

He was a fine-looking man, tall and dark. His eyes—why did their glance send a strange pang through the younger brother's heart? He still stood speechless. Dr. Falkland bowed politely, but with marked coldness.

"Thank God—thank God, you are come!" broke involuntarily from the father at last. "You will save her?"

"I will try to save her," said the physician, averting his eyes.

Then, as if putting a strong force upon himself, he looked full at the younger brother, and added:

"I will save her—if it be possible to man."

With these words he went upstairs, the family doctor anxiously escorting him.

The younger brother withdrew again to his study; his hard face sank upon his folded arms on the table, and he wept. When had he wept before? Oh, how long ago! Strange memories came back with those tears.

V.

"SHE will do now," said the family doctor: "you may rest from your anxiety. Dr. Falkland is quite satisfied about her. She will get well."

It was two days later. All this time the famed physician had been assiduous in his cares. By his skill, under God, he had brought back the colour to those ashen cheeks; the eyes had life in them again; the lips were faintly smiling.

"Yes, she will get well; I have left ample directions. Mr. Gregory is fully competent to take charge of the case, and to bring it safely through."

Dr. Falkland was drawing on his gloves as he spoke. His manner —which, with the patient, had been kindness itself: attentive, unselfish, courteous kindness—was now, as at first, strangely cold.

"I know not how to thank you," said the younger brother. "She is my dearest possession. I could not have lived without her. But here—pray accept——"

He held out, with some timidity—the doctor's manner compelled that—the cheque for ten thousand pounds.

"On no account," said Dr. Falkland, waving it back. "I have simply done my duty. I can on no account take any fee from you."

"But, Dr. Falkland, I cannot—I cannot think of such a thing. No fee! It is unexampled! And two days; this distance from London. I cannot think of it. Pray, from consideration for my feelings, accept this cheque."

"There was a time," said Dr. Falkland, immovable, "when a cheque for one-fifth of that amount would have saved a life—two lives. But that is past."

One-fifth! Two thousand pounds! Ah, the younger brother recollected. Like a flood those painful memories rushed over him. But how could Dr. Falkland know?

"Is there no way, none at all," he stammered, "in which I can repay you?"

"Yes, there is one; one way only. When you remember that I have, under God, saved your daughter, remember, also, that you might have saved my mother. As to my father—but enough—remember just that. That you might have saved my mother. This is all I ask. Good evening."

"One moment," cried the younger brother, as those dark eyes flashed full upon him; "your name is Falkland. Who are you?"

"My name was changed by the conditions of a property when I married. I am your nephew—the son of your elder brother—whom you might have rescued from dishonour worse than death—and would not. His imprisonment killed my mother. When he came out again, he found only her grave. That is all I ask. *Remember.*"

And he was gone.

VI.

Late on a summer's evening, a thin, grey man was knocking at the door of Dr. Falkland's London house. As he waited, the sunset glow was shining upon the creepered balconies, the flowered window-ledges on the opposite side of the square. Somehow, the red light recalled to him another evening—how many years ago? A gold circlet, twirling and sparkling over the rushing waters, a little boy's heart thumping in suppressed anguish—then kind, brotherly arms—a sudden joy—an unexpected gift!

In his attitude, his whole expression, deep humiliation was evident. He had begun, during the last few weeks, to stoop a little; his head was bowed; the shrewdness of his eyes had given place to another look, half anxious, half imploring.

The door was opened by a stately butler. Yes, Dr. Falkland was at home. Would he walk in? What name?

His voice quavered a little as he replied that he would give no name, if the doctor ——

He was interrupted. The physician himself, crossing the hall, saw him and came forward.

"May I speak to you alone?" asked the visitor. "I came to London on purpose."

Dr. Falkland bowed. In another moment they stood alone in the consulting room.

"I have come," said the younger brother, "to humble myself; to beseech you to forgive me. My child is well; but I cannot rest—I have no rest, either night or day."

"I can well believe it," said the young physician gravely; "but if forgiveness of mine can help you, I forgive you freely."

"But your father—he—Rolf; may I see your father?"

Then, once again, the grey man bowed his head and wept.

"You know that he is here—in this house?"

"I did not know—I guessed it. He remembers all, of course, as clearly as yesterday. Will he see me?"

"You are not aware of his state?"

The younger brother looked up in vague alarm.

"The seeds of brain disease were sown in the course of his long troubles. For many years he has been as a little child. Quite happy, full of love and gentleness; but his intellect gone. And now—he has long been failing—I am glad you are come. You are only just in time."

"Let me see him—let me see him at once," said the younger brother. The physician in silence led the way up a great flight of stairs. A large window on a lobby, opening westward, gave a glimpse, far off, of the river. Once more the red glow recalled that river of yore.

They reached a pleasant room, still westward. Still the red beams streamed in. Here, it seemed, was gathered every comfort, even every luxury, that one sick-room could contain. A fair young matron rose from a low chair beside a bed.

"My wife," said Dr. Falkland.

The younger brother bowed mechanically. His eyes had roamed beyond her, to the bed beside which she had been sitting, and which was strewn with toys and childish pictures. For there, in that bed, one toy in his feeble hand, his smiling glance absorbed in another at a little distance, lay, propped up with pillows, an old man.

An old man, and yet—— There were the same dark eyes, still kind, though somewhat vacant, as they rested upon the toy. There was the dark head—scarcely yet so grey as his own—which had so often been bowed to hear his childish tales of joy or sorrow. And he was not really old—he ought not to be old; not in years. But old! —he was very young! he was, as Dr. Falkland had said, a little child.

"Rolf!" he cried gleefully, "Rolf! Just look at that horse! These toys are really wonderful! I should not be surprised, now, if he jumped off the bed, and cantered round the room."

He looked up, laughing at his own fancy; and his eyes met the younger brother's.

"How do you do?" he said kindly, holding out his left hand, his right being engaged with the toy; "I am very glad to see you."

"Father!" said Dr. Falkland, coming gently to the bedside, "do you know who this gentleman is? Do you remember—your younger brother?"

For a moment the old man looked puzzled: then gazed upon the visitor, and was silent. The younger brother could no longer restrain himself. He sank on his knees beside the bed.

"Rolf," he cried, "Rolf"—and he pressed the feeble hand between his own—"Oh, Rolf, my brother! say that you know me! Let me hear you say just once, 'I forgive you, Jem.'"

At that once familiar name a gleam of intelligence revived in the old man's face. He looked searchingly into the grey eyes, once so keen, which, with beseeching penitence, met his own.

"Why, Jem, my little chap!" he said slowly—"Jem, old fellow!" And he laid his hand, as of old, upon the grey head, once so fair.

"Jem, my little chap, what is it?" he said once more. "Big Kelly again? Never mind! You shall have another watch. I've no money—but I can sell Morcar. Come and tell me all about it, my little lad."

Then, with a mighty effort, he turned himself in the bed, clasped both his arms around the younger brother's neck; and all was silence.

When they unwound his arms, and raised his face, there was a smile upon it like the smile of a satisfied child. And like a child he lay sleeping—his last sleep.

DARBY AND JOAN.

We two sit silent, our fire beside,
It's just a year since I was your bride,
We look at each other, but neither is seen,
Because of the ghosts that rise between.

What a cloudy crowd of them! ghost on ghost,
Of all you have lived for, and all you have lost;
They blind you, and so you will never see
How well you might leave them and come to me!

I know you could do what I cannot do;
I cannot brave them and go to you;
Yet they are but shadows—what frightens me
Is another ghost which you cannot see.

A PAGE OF THE PAST.

A GREAT, grim hotel, rendered even grimmer and more ghostly by the gleam of the gas-lamps in the street, and the snow which was rapidly falling. Not a ray from one of the long row of high, narrow windows; not a beam from beneath the closed wings of the enormous porte cochère. You would have said the place was utterly deserted and given over to the rampaging of rats and the spinning of spiders. Yet, precisely as the clock of the neighbouring church struck nine, a cab drove up the dreary street and halted before the building in question. Not a cab in the English sense of the word, but a fabric made up of shrivelled leather and shrunken wood, and drawn by a horse to which perhaps neither of these adjectives would have been inapplicable. The driver had all the rotundity to himself, in his oilskin hat and glistening macintosh. He rolled his gentle person down from the box, gave a loud rap with the enormous dolphin-head knocker, and then opened the door of the vehicle.

A minute passed. The rattle of a chain was heard within, and the next moment the one leaf of the heavy porte-cochère swung slowly back, exposing to view an old white-headed serving man in dark clothes, one hand upon the immense lock, the other raising on high a flaring candle in a huge silver candlestick.

Then, and only then, the occupant of the cab came forth; slowly, carefully, with a very visible hobble in his gait, and entered into the gloom of the enormous vestibule. He was enveloped in a long sort of military cloak, and the lurid rays of the flaring candle falling upon him as he passed, showed the features to be those of a man of perhaps sixty.

The cab had driven off, the heavy door had been closed with a clang that echoed throughout the building, and the visitor, following the servant—candlestick ever on high—proceeded to mount the broad steps of the wide uncarpeted marble staircase. On entering the enormous ante-chamber, from whose dark walls the full-length portraits seemed to gaze frowningly down, Germain set his light down upon the long centre table, and silently divested the visitor of his cloak. Then, crossing to one of the opposite doors, to the left of the huge carved fireplace, drew back the dark red portière.

The old gentleman passed through into the saloon beyond. It was dreary in the extreme, as were the other two which he had to traverse before reaching the mistress of the house. Heavy sofas and immovable chairs were set formally round the walls; heavy silk curtains and antique cabinets, tarnished mirrors and gilding, fretted ceilings, with faded gods and goddesses frowning or simpering down from their

cloudy panels. The whole glinting faintly and fitfully through the pervading gloom as the faithful Germain passed on, following in the track of the visitor, with his candle on high and his carpet shoes softly thudding over the carefully-waxed floors.

In the third saloon, which was much smaller than its two giant companions, things wore a less cheerless appearance. Two of the clusters of wax-lights on the high mantelpiece were burning, and shed a soft radiance around, falling full and clearly upon the large oval portrait immediately above. A lovely portrait too. A young girl in rose-coloured satin and lace, with a profusion of gold-tinted hair, dark, laughter-loving eyes, a slightly retroussé nose, and a complexion like the heart of a sea-shell. Head-dress and robe told of at least half a century back.

The visitor glanced up at the portrait as he passed, gave a stifled sigh, and then, with hurried step, limped after the faithful Germain. The latter noiselessly opened the wide white-and-gold door, and, in a low, subdued tone, announced : " M. le Marquis de Pommarais."

Striving hard to conceal his hobble, the old gentleman entered the apartment beyond.

A room lovely even in its evident decay. Not large, octagon-shaped, a ceiling heavy with gilding and stucco, and out of whose panels cupids smiled down while scattering handsful of roses—walls hung with pale pink velvet—low couches and easy-chairs to match, a small cabinet or two in ebony and ivory—the whole softly lighted by half-a-dozen tapers in the small rock-crystal chandelier. The air heavy with the scent of flowers—chiefly roses—scattered about, and tepid with the pleasant warmth of the cheerful fire that glowed redly upon the hearth. Curtains carefully drawn over closed padded shutters, so as to keep out all noise from without. Two low and deep armchairs drawn up before the fireplace ; one of which was occupied by a little old lady in dove-coloured satin, with a knot of dark geranium-coloured ribbon upon her breast and a veil of black lace somewhat coquettishly arranged upon the snowy white hair.

" Good evening, Duchess," said the gentleman, bending over, and gallantly kissing the hand extended towards him.

" Good evening, Marquis."

And then the latter took the seat prepared for him, and stretched out his chilled feet towards the welcome warmth of the old-fashioned wood fire.

For the last thirty years this had, almost without interruption, been his constant evening visit. Had he not put in his usual nine o'clock appearance, the Duchess of Altamonte would have at once begun to foresee an apoplectic fit, or perhaps even the end of the world itself.

" Terrible weather, Duchess."

" So Germain tells me. Ah me ! for the days in which snow and rain were as unfelt as the sunshine and flowers."

The Marquis nodded assent as he looked over towards his companion.

She was a very lovely old woman—as beautiful in her old age as she had been at sweet sixteen, when, a young bride, she had sat for the oval portrait in the next room.

True, her hair was white as the driven snow now, and the features were sharper; but the sea-shell complexion was still there; while the dark eyes gleamed pleasantly forth as mischievously as ever, and the teeth, as shown between the finely-cut lips, were—well, I'm not *quite* sure about the teeth, they were too charmingly white and even to be altogether strangers to the great American dentist—so I will say no more about them, save that they helped to make up a picture as pretty as you might well wish to look upon.

Her hands were the very perfection of an old woman's hands—purely white, though shrivelled, and with the blue veins showing softly clear beneath the delicate skin. Slim, taper fingers, laden with glittering rings. One hand held a large ivory fan, the other lay carelessly upon her lap.

"Ah me! indeed," echoed the Marquis. "Though, for that matter, all the world seems going wrong."

"You are right there, indeed. For even in my retirement it makes itself felt. Why, only to-day, Madame Marengo, the banker's wife, had the impertinence to send up her card."

"And you?"

"Told Germain to burn it, of course."

"Things are coming to a pretty pass, indeed."

"No more distinction of class—anywhere—all mixed up, like the seasons. Who ever heard of snow before All Saints in *our* young days?"

"No, indeed. Winter was winter then, and summer, summer."

"But it's greatly our own fault, do you know, Marquis; not about the seasons, but about the classes—we have not kept our places. On the contrary, we have kept on yielding step after step, and backing before the flood."

"Can you then wonder, Duchess, if all these rich upstarts take advantage and press on?"

"Especially with royalty giving them the occasion as it now ever does. Who ever heard of Madame Bianco or Monsieur Bruno being received at court till nowadays? Ah, I'm very glad I retired in time."

She brushed off some imaginary fluff from her dress with her fan, as if it had been the Biancos and Brunos in question.

"Ah, yes, it was very different when I was in office."

"Yes, I should think it was! Life was worth living then."

"What a difference now!"

As he said this the memory of those other palmy days started up before him. The great saloons he had just passed through in silence

and shivering, radiant with all that was genial and bright—the music and the voices, the glitter and the whispers, the smile of the lovely young hostess. Here he looked up. The old lady opposite was smiling at him—the spirit of the smile of days gone by yet lingered in that which now met him. Matter had changed for the worse, it is true, but the immaterial was ever the same. He read her thoughts, and replied to them with a smile of his own.

"Ah, Duchess, do you remember that evening after the ball when I ——"

"Hid yourself behind a curtain till all the rest were gone, and then came out, like harlequin after the play is over, to have a peep at the deserted scene."

"And you ——"

"Showed you the door, if I remember rightly."

"And I returned by the window, if I don't forget."

"Ah, Marquis, you were always a regular dare-devil!"

The old lady tapped his arm with her fan. He smiled and drew himself somewhat up in his deep arm-chair.

"And then you had not the gout, you know," she added, mischievously.

The Marquis did not smile this time. He gave a heavy sigh and a slight shrug of his shrunken shoulders.

"Nor I my rheumatism. Just see if that window behind me is properly closed. I sometimes think that even Germain is going the way of all the rest of them, and thinking of nothing but himself. I'm sure I feel a draught upon my shoulders."

The old gentleman hastened to obey. The draught existed but in the imagination of the old lady; as, truth to say, did numberless other things of somewhat less insignificance.

"We are both horribly dull to-night, Marquis; suppose you tell me a story to pass the time till Germain brings in the tea. It's quite early yet."

The clock upon the mantelpiece chimed out ten as if in response.

"A story? Well, yes, though I do not exactly know ——"

"Oh, hunt up something in that wicked old head of yours; something true, you know, with just a spice of scandal to flavour it—you know exactly what I mean."

The old gentleman passed his delicate hand across his brow, and would probably have gone on to caress his hair, had he not been afraid of deranging the Paris-made toupet with which the summit of his cranium was garnished. After a moment's silence on his part, and expectation on hers, he said:

"Did I ever tell you the history of her Majesty's—her late Majesty, of course—sapphire brooch?"

"No, never. That will do famously. You can begin in orthodox nursery style—'Once upon a time there lived a king.'"

She stopped and sighed, for the thought obtruded itself that neither

the Marquis nor herself were very distant from that second childhood that so pitilessly awaits those who are forced to linger somewhat too long in this go-ahead world of ours.

"I scarcely wonder at your never hearing of it, for it was hushed up as well as might be, and you were in St. Petersburg when it happened."

"Ah, dear St. Petersburg!" murmured the old lady, letting her fan slide from her grasp, and clasping her two hands upon her lap. "I shall always look back to those days as golden ones."

Whether the late Duke's (he was ambassador there) having caught bronchitis in the said city, that finally carried him off, had anything to influence those "golden" days, the old Marquis was too prudent and polite to inquire. He simply cleared his ancient throat and started:

"I was one evening waiting for his Majesty in the yellow saloon —you remember the yellow saloon, Duchess?"

"Yes, I should think I do! No fair woman could ever fail remembering and hating it after she had once set her foot in it. Please go on."

"For I was to accompany his Majesty to one of his shooting boxes for a day's hunting, and we were to return in time for the opera next night. Madame X. was to sing in the Huguenots, and the whole Court and town were in a state of excitement and expectation."

"Of course they were, as was quite natural—and his Majesty in particular, if certain tales are to be credited—for X. was an artiste among a thousand and a beauty among a million."

"Quite wrong for once, Duchess—there was never anything but a platonic affection ——"

"Now, Marquis, Marquis, don't talk nonsense—you know better than that. The idea of a platonic affection between a handsome woman—an artiste into the bargain—and a crowned head! Preposterous! As well say that tow and tinder won't blaze up on coming together! But just go on."

The gentleman shrugged his shoulders and continued:

"At last his Majesty came in, and we were just going to leave, when he exclaimed in a vexed tone: 'I had quite forgotten to-day is the 25th—Fifine's birthday, and I promised her a doll.' Then, after biting the tip of his glove, as was his wont when perplexed, he added: 'Just wait here a minute; I'll go and see what's to be done.'

"So I waited—and in less than five minutes he came back smiling, and with a long parcel in his hand. 'Fifine shall have her doll all in time—I've purloined one of Princess A.'s for the moment. Tell Mademoiselle La Roche to have it replaced.' Fifine, you know, was Madame X.'s little girl, and Mademoiselle La Roche was governess to his own little daughter. So we got into the carriage and drove off, stopping on the way at Madame X.'s lodgings and

handing over the doll to her maid, who had come down to the carriage.

"We got back the next evening just in time to dress for the theatre. But, on entering the palace, we were met by a piece of news that, for the moment, put everything else out of our heads."

"Ah! now we are coming to it," put in the Duchess.

"Well, not quite so fast as you think, perhaps."

"Go on, then. What was the news?"

"Nothing less than a robbery in the palace."

"Princess A.'s doll perhaps?" laughed the old lady.

"Something rather more serious. A splendid sapphire brooch had disappeared from the Queen's toilet-table and was nowhere to be found or accounted for. The brooch was priceless and matchless. Her Majesty was dreadfully angry, for the jewel was a favourite one and ——"

"I can quite feel for her. Sapphires are such lovely stones!"

"Of course the thing had been kept as quiet as possible, awaiting the King's return—and then ——"

"Ah, we all know what a palace secret is! Something that everyone within the walls knows and is dying to speak of—only doesn't dare. Well?"

"The King was quite as much puzzled as the rest. No one had been in her Majesty's apartments except the lady in waiting, the young Princesses and their governess, and the usual attendants. They of course were above all suspicion. Nor could anyone gain access to the dressing-room, unless by passing through the private drawing-rooms on the one side, and the children's playroom and bed-chambers on the other. And yet someone must have taken the jewel—for gone it was."

"What a pity there were no clairvoyants in those days," said the Duchess. "It might have made the fortune of one of them, at least."

"But there were not, you see. They are a later invention."

"Yes, like imitation bric-à-brac—and about as barefaced. But go on."

"So, there being no clairvoyants, the head of the police was sent for ——"

"A much wiser plan!"

"And the whole thing confided to him, with the order to set to work as quickly and silently as possible."

"And then?"

"We dressed and went to the theatre."

"Ah, the tow and tinder are drawing nigh each other."

"Well, his Majesty *was* somewhat tinderish that evening, if you like to call it so. The hunt had turned out all but a failure, and the news of the robbery completed the measure of his ill-humour. The drive to the opera house was not a pleasant one."

"I daresay not."

"And, altogether, I was anything but sorry when it came to an end. We had not been seated very long before the moment for X.'s appearance upon the stage arrived. You might have heard a mouse sigh, so silent and attentive was the whole house."

"Yes, not like nowadays, when people do nothing but chatter. Rich, vulgar women lolling in their boxes and trying to outvie each other in the number of their visits and the loudness of their tongues."

"At last she came on—advanced right under the royal box, and made her courtesy. And at the same instant her Majesty exclaimed, in a tone loud enough, I fear, to have been heard half-a-dozen boxes off: 'My sapphire brooch! She has on my brooch!'"

"That wasn't queen-like, but I can quite believe it of her late Majesty. She was terribly bourgeois at times. Pray go on."

"And there it was, sure enough—that unfortunate brooch—sparkling away as openly upon the X.'s breast as if her Majesty herself had placed it there."

"Perhaps *his* Majesty had done so."

"Fie, fie, Duchess, how prone you are to think evil!"

"My dear Marquis, as you are to speak good; I believe the amount of sincerity is about equal in both."

"How so?"

"Why, you dear, innocent man, has habit become such a second nature to you that you forget that court-bred people never say just what they think, nor think just what they say? Now, pray finish shrugging your shoulders, and go on. What did the tinder do?"

"Well, his Majesty stared as if he had seen the devil start up before him—I must say that."

"And then?"

"Why, of course despatched me to await the X. at her dressing-room door to ask for an explanation."

"A pleasant charge!"

"Very. During all my long years of service I never had another like it."

"It was flattering to your character as a diplomat."

"Flattery is at times very dearly bought."

"Is it? Well, I can't remember having ever paid so very high a price for any of mine; and I suppose I have had my fair share."

"Duchess, there never was flattery in your case."

"Now, Marquis, don't forget your gout, and go on with your story."

"I found Fifine in her mother's dressing-room, and was right glad of it. I was a favourite with the child, and she came as usual and climbed up upon my knee.

"'Shall I show you my doll?' she asked.

"'What doll, Fifine?' I responded, for my head was running at that moment upon quite other things than dolls

"'Why, the beautiful doll the King sent me last night. I'll get it for you in a moment.'

"She slid down from her seat, and brought me her treasure from behind the cushions of the sofa opposite.

"'Isn't it lovely?' she said, holding up the toy, which was dressed in blue satin, and had a complexion that reminded me of yours, Duchess."

"Now, pray don't forget that gout of yours, Marquis."

"But I have never had gout in my tongue, and so ——"

"More's the pity, your enemies might say. Dear me, what a twitch of rheumatism! I'm *sure* that that window is not properly closed. No, don't look again; it's quite useless! Germain shall see to it—he'll be here directly with the tea."

"Then I had better finish."

"Oh, quite at your leisure."

"So I sat admiring the doll, and thinking all the while how I should begin my wretched task, when the X. entered. Suddenly I was called back to myself by the child's saying, 'Don't you think mamma was very, *very* naughty not to leave me the pretty brooch too?'

"'What brooch, Fifine?' I cried, in such a tone as almost to frighten the child.

"'Why, the brooch that was sticking here,' and she put her little rosy finger upon the doll's breast; 'a lovely blue brooch, all glittering like glass. *I* say the King sent it to *me* with dolly; but mamma says she is *sure* he sent it to *her*. Will you ask him?'"

"Ah, you see I was right! The tinder did it, and the tow was beginning to smoulder, I suppose."

"I don't know; but the X. came in at this moment, and setting down the child, I rose. You may be sure I talked to her of anything except the bauble I had come about, and, after a few compliments, left the dressing-room and returned to the box."

"Yes, of course," said the Duchess, with a nod of approval.

"You may think how my arrival was looked for! 'And my brooch?' whispered the Queen. 'Well?' asked the King.

"I took his Majesty aside and told him all I knew—how the brooch had been found sticking in the doll's bosom—how Fifine had claimed it for her own—but how Fifine's mamma had evidently taken it as a delicate attention to herself. How the brooch got there was still a mystery.

"The King gave one of his hearty little laughs as I ended, and I knew by that that all his previous ill-humour had fled. He whispered something to the Queen, and nothing more was said upon the matter till we got back to the palace. There the mystery was quickly cleared up. The little Princess had taken the brooch from her Majesty's dressing-table to decorate her doll with—and in his hurry the King had not remarked the costly addition. That was the whole mystery."

"The whole *ostensible* mystery, at any rate."

"Duchess, you are tremendously severe to-night. I really do begin to believe the window there must be ill-closed."

"Never mind the window, now. How did the affair end?"

"Well, it *could* only end in one way. The X. was left in quiet possession of the brooch, and I daresay to this very day exhibits it as a token of royal admiration for her talent. The Queen received another from his Majesty, and the whole affair was hushed up as far as possible."

"And that was all?"

"Well, I believe Princess A. received a little lesson which effectually prevented her from ever laying her little fingers upon her mamma's dressing-table again. — Do you still feel a draught, Duchess?"

"No—I feel that I want my tea. There, the clock is striking—and here comes Germain with the tray."

SOMEBODY'S DARLING.

Soft bright eyes,
Of the sky's own blue,
A soul like a star
That twinkles through;
A dear little face
With a dimpled chin,
A dear little heart,
Not hard to win;
A tiny tongue,
That chatters all day;
Tiny white hands
For ever at play—
Blithe as a fairy,
Small and as fleet,
True and tender,
Loving and sweet.

Locks like the sunshine
Crowning her head,
Cheeks of pale peach-bloom,
Lips rosy-red;
Soft airs about her
Fresh as the Spring,
Ever new fancies
Fleet on the wing;
Life in her laughter,
Love in her wiles,
Health in her gladness,
Heaven in her smiles—
Patiently gentle,
Playfully wild,
More than an angel,
Ever a child.

George Cotterell.

M. ELLEN STAPLES. R. TAYLOR.

"MUST IT GO ON WITH US FOR EVER?"

THE ARGOSY.

AUGUST, 1890.

THE HOUSE OF HALLIWELL.

BY MRS. HENRY WOOD, AUTHOR OF "EAST LYNNE."

CHAPTER XX.

THE CLERGYMAN'S HOME.

A NUMBER of clergy were pouring out of the town of Chelsbro', for the Archdeacon had that day held a visitation in its cathedral. Some who were not pressed for time or funds had proceeded from the cathedral to one or other of the hotels to take up their quarters for the night, but by far the larger portion turned their way to their country homes. We must notice one, who set off to walk. He was of middle height and slender frame, with a look, not altogether of ill-health about him, but as if he had none too much superfluous strength. A walk of nine miles was before him, and the cold evening was drawing on. He glanced up at the skies dubiously. They threatened rain, and he was not well protected from it, if it came, for he was only in his black clothes and white neckcloth. He had a great coat at home, but it was shabby: the seams were white, and there was a piece let in at one of the elbows, and it was darned under the arms, so he had not dared to put it on that morning when he was going to mix with his brother clergy.

And now that Chelsbro' was left behind and he was on the lonely road, where he was likely to meet few, if any, observers, he drew off his black gloves, and, diving into a pocket of his coat, pulled out some bread-and-butter, wrapped in a piece of paper. He proceeded to eat it with the air of a man whose appetite is dainty or has passed. His had, for he had fasted since the morning; but he knew that to keep up his strength at all he must eat, and, failing good food, he must eat plain. But the butter was salt and made him thirsty, and he felt giddy with his long confinement in the cold cathedral, and his limbs shrank from the walk before him.

"This will never do," he murmured, looking at his small stock of money, which proved to be eighteenpence. "I wonder if I could afford a glass of ale? To do so, I must change the sixpence."

He turned with a sigh, for sixpences with him were not to be changed lightly, into a public-house which stood on the roadside. The landlady came forward from the bar.

"A glass of ale, if you please, Mrs. Finch, to fortify me for my walk."

"With pleasure, sir. Please step into the parlour. We have just got in some famous double stout; perhaps you would prefer a glass of that?"

The clergyman hesitated. He would have preferred the stout: it was a luxury he did not often taste; but he feared the price might be more than the ale. He could not for shame ask: the blush mantled in his pale cheek at the thought. So he said he would take ale, and the landlady brought it, and stood by gossiping while he drank it.

"You have got a smart walk afore you, sir," she remarked, as he prepared to depart; "and I am afeared it will rain. You don't look over strong to face it; not as hearty, sir, as when you was last by here, in the summer."

"I must put my best foot foremost."

"We shall soon be a-going to tea, sir, if you'd wait—if I might make so bold as offer to send you a cup in here, with a bit of ham—a beauty we have in cut," resumed the kind-hearted landlady, scanning her visitor's slender form and knowing his slender income.

"Thank you," he interrupted; "you are very kind, but I must not spare the time: I must get on before the rain comes. One of my parishioners is also dangerously ill, and on his account I must not delay. Good-afternoon, Mrs. Finch: once more, thank you kindly."

He walked on, and had gained the fourth milestone when the rain began heavily. Some trees formed a shelter by the roadside, and he halted under them, the bent, twisted trunk of one affording a sort of seat. He removed his hat, and rubbed his forehead with his handkerchief. It was a wide, expansive forehead, but the hair was wearing off the temples, as it often does with those who have a weight of thought or care upon them. The skies looked dark around, as if the rain had set in for the night, and the grey of the evening was coming on. He watched the rain, gloomily enough. The prospect of soaking his new clothes, and so causing them to shrink, was not a cheering one, for it was indeed hidden in the womb of time when he might be able to provide himself with another suit. But there was a darker fear still. Last winter, and the winter before, and for several winters previous to that, a suspicion of rheumatism had flown about him, and Jessup the doctor had warned him, not a week ago, that a good wetting might fix it on him. He could not fail being wet to the skin, if he walked five miles in that rain.

Just then the sound of wheels was heard, on the Chelsbro' side, and the clergyman looked eagerly in the direction. Should it be any farmer in his gig who knew him, or a parishioner, they would give him a lift.

It was neither farmer nor parishioner. It was the luxurious carriage of the Reverend Mr. Cockburn, his fellow-labourer at Chelson. He was being driven home from the visitation. He happened to be looking from the right-hand window as he passed—a stout, red-faced man, but he did not stop the carriage, or offer the vacant seat at his side. "He may not have seen me," murmured the poor clergyman to himself, as he gazed wistfully after the wheels of the fast-retreating chariot. "Though I did think, until to-day, that he would have invited me to go and return with him."

It sped out of sight, and he had nothing to do but watch the rain again. His thoughts reverted to the contrast in his position with that of the rich man who had driven by. Not always could he prevent their reverting to it. It was almost a case of Dives and Lazarus: The Reverend Mr. Cockburn was the rector of St. Paul's, one of the two churches at Chelson. The living was worth fourteen hundred a-year, and he had also a private fortune. His table was luxurious, his servants were many, he had carriages and saddle-horses, he went out every summer for three months—it was necessary for his health, he represented to the Bishop of Chelsbro', and for that of Mrs. Cockburn—but when he was at home he took no trouble with his parish, all the hard work in it being turned over to his curate. *He*, the Reverend Alfred Halliwell, with his delicate wife and his seven children, could find but a bare allowance of clothes and food, for St. Stephen's living, of which he was the incumbent, was not worth one hundred and fifty pounds, all told. He was a more eloquent man in the pulpit than he who had driven past, was more learned in theology, had taken higher honours at the university; he was more active in the parish labours than that gentleman and his curate put together; yet he could scarcely live, whilst Mr. Cockburn—"I am getting into this dissatisfied train of thought again," he meekly uttered. "Lord, keep me from it!"

There seemed to be no probability of the rain leaving off. Of course he could not remain under the trees all night, so he rose and walked on in it. Before he reached Chelson he was thoroughly wetted, and glad enough he was to see the lights of the town. It was dark then; and as he passed by the railings of a large house at the town entrance, the glare of light from the windows of its reception-rooms struck upon his eyes. Fires were blazing in both: the blinds being drawn down in one, but in the other he saw the cloth laid for dinner, and the rich wine in the decanters was glittering in the fire-light. Involuntarily he halted to contemplate the picture of luxury and comfort, but at that moment the clocks rang out seven, and he hastened on. It was the residence of Mr. Cockburn.

A few minutes more brought him to the door of his own home, a newly-erected, small red-brick house. He had been obliged to remove from the vicarage, for the damp there had threatened to lay him up for life. His wife never had her health; his children were

continually ailing; and at length Mr. Jessup said if they wished to live, they must leave the vicarage. So he took this house near, which reduced his scanty income by two-and-twenty pounds.

He knocked at the door, and a troop of eager feet ran to it. His second and third children were girls of nine and ten: they wore soiled merino frocks and ragged pinafores. "Oh, papa!" exclaimed Emma, "how wet you are!"

He laid his hand fondly on as many heads as came within its reach, and went into the parlour. His wife was lying on the sofa, and the fire had gone out.

"Why, Mabel! No fire! I am drenched and shivering."

She rose up, pressing her temples. "You naughty children! How could you let the fire out? Why did you not look to it? Oh, Alfred, I have had such a day with these boys! It is always the same. The moment you are gone, they turn the house out of its windows with uproar. I ceased to speak to them at last, and lay down with a pillow over my ears. My head is splitting!"

"Have you any tea?" inquired Mr. Halliwell, too familiar with these complaints to take much notice of them.

"I'm sure I don't know whether Betty kept the tea-pot. Annie, go and see."

"Papa," cried George, the eldest, a high-spirited boy of eleven, running in, "Betty says she has some warm dry things for you, for she guessed you would be wet. And she says you had better change them by the kitchen fire, and she'll put the young ones to bed the while."

He went shivering into the kitchen, thankful that there was a fire somewhere and someone to think of him. Betty, the prop and stay of the domestic house, was little altered, except in age, and her hair was more grey and untidy than ever. At the time of the Vicar's marriage, she had been discharged for a more stylish servant; but when things grew hard with them, they were glad to take on old Betty and her worth again. Younger servants liked to dress finely and were perpetually wanting their wages, which could not always conveniently be paid. Betty never asked for hers; and, let her fare as hard as she would, never complained of the food. She had her faults: does anyone know a servant without them? Her chief one was a crabbed temper; Mrs. Halliwell called it "cross-grained." However, Betty was never cross-grained with her master: she held him in too high reverence.

"Why, master," she exclaimed, "if you are not dripping wet! Couldn't you borrow no umbrella, nor coat, nor nothing? Do pray make haste, and get the things off."

"Papa," cried a sturdy young fellow, who had sat himself down on the warm bricks before the kitchen fire, "do you know they have been to say ——"

"Now, Master Tom, hold your tongue," interposed Betty, sharply.

"Kiss your papa, and say good-night, and I'll take you and some of the rest to bed. Sir, don't lose no time, for I know you must be a-catching cold."

"Good-night, Thomas," he said, stooping to kiss the child. "Stay: have you said your prayers."

"Oh, I'll hear him his prayers," answered Betty, in tones that savoured somewhat of irreverence. "You get them things off, sir."

Betty shut the door, and took Tom and three more upstairs to bed. She was not long over it: there was no time to be long over anything in that house. When she returned, the Vicar had put on the warm clothes, and was arranging the wet ones.

"They have let the fire out in the parlour," she began. "I never did see such a house as this. If I don't have my eye over everything, it goes wrong. I took in a fresh box of coal, and told 'em to be sure and keep up a good fire for you: and missis lies down, and the others gets playing, and of course out it goes. Such a noise as there have been all day! enough to drive one crazy. Missis don't keep 'em in order one bit, and if I goes to do it, she's angry with me. Master, you'll have your tea by the fire here, won't you?"

"Is there any tea?" was the reply.

"Why, sir! and the teapot on the trivet, there, a-staring you in the face! I made it after they had done theirs, so it have been a-stewing long enough. Did you think, sir, I had put it there empty, with nothing in it?"

He had not thought about it. His outer eyes had no doubt seen the teapot, standing above the fire, but his mind was absent, and he could not have told whether it was a teapot or a saucepan, or, indeed, whether it was anything at all.

"I'll see to them, master," cried Betty, whisking the wet clothes out of his hand; "you can't do no good with them." She then drew a small round table close to the fire, put a cup and saucer on it, with a little bit of cold steak and some bread, and poured out the tea.

"Betty! that was what went out for your dinner," exclaimed Mrs. Halliwell, who had come into the kitchen, and sat down by her husband. "You must have eaten nothing."

"I ate enough," crossly responded Betty, who had an angry aversion to being reminded of her own acts of kindness. "Meat don't agree with me, and I have said so twenty times; I prefers potaters. I wish it had been more for master: he must want it bad enough, after his walk."

"I trust you have not taken cold, Alfred," said Mrs. Halliwell, in a concerned tone. "Oh—did Betty tell you Stokes's servant came down just before you returned? He was worse, and had asked for the Sacrament."

Up started Mr. Halliwell. "I'll go at once," he said; "why did you not tell me?"

"Now, ma'am!" remonstrated Betty, "as if you could not have

let him drink his tea in peace! I warned the children not to say anything till their papa was dry and comfortable; and they didn't, only Tom, and I stopped him. Sit still, sir, and finish your morsel of meat.' Old Stokes ain't a-going off this minute; he ain't in such a mortal hurry as all that. You have plenty of time."

He thought not. He was ever most anxious to fulfil his duties, especially towards the poor and the sick; few clergymen had a deeper sense of their great responsibility in the sight of God. He swallowed the meat standing, gulped down the scalding tea, put on his old great coat, and started off into the wet again.

The reader may glean that the Reverend Alfred Halliwell's life was cast in a sea of perplexity, and so his sister Hester found it when she went to stay a week with them about this time. She had not been to Chelson since that first visit, twelve years ago, and had not seen Mabel since her marriage. All she could do, at first, was to look at her, for she had never seen so great an alteration in anyone. Instead of two-and-thirty, she looked two-and-forty; and her countenance wore a sad, unresisting expression, as if she could lie down under troubles, but never battle with them.

"It is the hard life I live," she said, in answer to a remark of Hester's; "the constant anxiety, the worry and trouble of the children. Ah, Miss Halliwell! do you remember begging me to consider the future well before I hastened to marry upon so small an income? You told me that the daily crosses and privations, inseparable from a home of poverty, pressed more heavily upon the wife than the husband."

"I do remember it, Mabel."

"If I had only listened to you! But mamma was most to blame. She must have known how difficult it was to exist upon such a living as Alfred's. I think they were all mad in those days."

"Who?" asked Hester.

"The girls of Chelson and their mothers. From the moment Alfred was appointed here, they began to hunt him down, as dogs hunt a hare. Mamma kept me in the background because she wanted my elder sisters to marry first; but I was led away by example and the popular mania, contrived meetings with the new clergyman for myself, and he chose me. Oh! that it had been any of them, instead of me! Not that I regret it, except in a pecuniary light. Alfred has been an excellent husband to me, one in ten thousand. But this wearing, hopeless poverty is enough to turn my brain."

"Mabel, I do think you might have managed a little better."

"I know I was a bad manager at first, but the best management will not stave off sickness, and it is sickness which has so pulled us down. The vicarage was such a place to live in! You saw nothing of it: you were only there in the summer months: but in winter the damp positively ran down the walls. How the children were reared

in it, I don't know; but I believe another winter in it would have done for Alfred. Once we were all down, except Alfred and Betty and one of the boys, with an infectious fever. I cannot tell the money we owe Mr. Jessup."

"I am sorry to hear it," said Hester.

"It must be a great deal. He has never sent in his bill. I will say that everyone has been most considerate to us. Alfred has given him small sums off it from time to time, as he could afford. But with so many children to clothe and feed, what can be spared out of two pounds a-week?"

"You have more than that, Mabel."

"Very little, I can assure you. In the first year or two of our marriage we got into debt; and yet I strove to be contriving and economical. But I suppose I had not the knack of it; I was so inexperienced; and we began life more as I had been accustomed to live at my mother's. People were free enough to blame us, I heard; but I declare that we had no ill intention: it seemed that the more we strove to save, the deeper into debt we fell. My illnesses were expensive, and they came on so rapidly; and I had the luck at those times of having a selfish nurse and extravagant servant, who managed the housekeeping between them, and pretty bills came in! Then we had bought some furniture on our marriage, and that debt embarrassed us. So Alfred came to the resolution of borrowing a few hundreds ——"

"It was the worst resolution he could have come to," interrupted Hester.

"Well, he did it. But we believed that at papa's death we should be able to pay off everything, and be beforehand with the world. But when poor papa did die, we found there was nothing: mamma, even, was left badly off. So, ever since, we have been struggling to pay off this money: a little one year and a little another, besides the interest. Oh, Hester, I am weary of life! The same cares, the same pinchings, from year's end to year's end. Matilda has never forgiven me for marrying Alfred; for she counted on having him herself; but she is much better off than I am—she is out as nursery governess, and gets thirty pounds a-year. Girls are so eager to be married; but they would be less so if they could take a peep into the mirror of the future. 'Marry in haste, and repent at leisure.'"

The children now began to come into the room. Hester had seen the elder ones the previous night, but the rest had gone to bed when she arrived.

"What is the matter with this one?" she hastily exclaimed, as a sickly-looking little thing limped in behind the rest.

"That is David," said Mrs. Halliwell. "We fear he was thrown down; for, when about two years old, he suddenly grew lame, and then abscesses formed. He is never without them. But his health does not seem to suffer: and he has a great appetite."

The child looked up at Hester, with his wan face and his dreamy brown eyes, betraying so much mind. He gave a faint cry when she took him on her knee.

"Do I hurt you, my little boy?"

"It always hurts me," he answered. "Not much."

"Now, children," said their mamma, "run into the kitchen. You are to have your breakfast there this morning. Sam, don't look so gloomy: Betty has some treacle."

"Oh," shouted Sam, "that's famous!" And he rushed off, followed by the others. Hester kept David on her knee.

"Let him go with the rest, Hester," said Mrs. Halliwell. "If he remains here he will be wanting the eggs. Betty is boiling three for us."

"Oh, Mabel! if he does!" she involuntarily exclaimed. "How can you begrudge an egg to this sickly child?"

Mabel looked at her sister-in-law till the tears stood in her eyes. "Begrudge it! I would *sell* myself to procure proper food for my children, but if it cannot be procured, what am I to do? We had these eggs in, because you were coming, and we could not put one on the table for you, and go without ourselves; it would make our poverty too conspicuous. You see you are making me betray the secrets of our prison-house," she added, with a bad attempt at merriment.

"I really beg your pardon, Mabel. I spoke without reflection."

"You only spoke as others would have spoken—all who possess not my bitter experience. It is a shame," resumed Mrs. Halliwell, in tones of deep indignation, "that the Church of England should pay her ministers so badly! Its glaring contrasts are enough to sicken one of religion, as pertaining to the Establishment. Who can wonder that we have so many Dissenters? Look no further than this town: the one church giving its minister fourteen hundred a-year, the other only one hundred and fifty: and the worst paid has the most to do; double, nearly, to the other. Why should not these livings be rendered more equal?"

"I suppose it could not be done, under the present system," said Hester.

"Then the system should be changed," returned Mrs. Halliwell. "It is a crying sin, Hester, that a gentleman who has dedicated his life to the service of the Church should be paid less than a common mechanic. Alfred makes me wild, because he takes things so patiently. I know he feels them, but he never complains or murmurs; and when I break out, which I can't help doing, he goes on, in his mild, stupid, uncomplaining way, about *bearing* one's cross in patient silence. I can't, and I don't try to."

"Where is he?" inquired Hester, thinking it might be as well, just then, not to argue the point. "Not up yet?"

"Don't you know? He is at church, reading prayers. That is the reason we are waiting breakfast. Nothing would satisfy some

of the people but they must have a daily service at eight; so the two churches take it alternately, two months each, and Alfred's turn is on at present. He is worked nearly off his legs. This is a straggling parish, with many poor, and always some sick. Then there are the schools to attend to, and the different charity clubs and meetings, and the service on the saints' days; and, if you please, the church has now to be opened twice a week, from eleven till twelve, and Alfred has to stick himself there, in case any baptisms or churchings come in. A parcel of rubbish!"

Hester could not help laughing, Mrs. Halliwell brought out the last sentence with such intense indignation.

"Well, I have cause to say it," she went on. "If they work Alfred so much, they ought to pay him better. He had two pupils who were reading with him, and their pay helped him a great deal; but when they put on all these new-fashioned duties, he was compelled to give them up. It *is* a shame."

Just then Mr. Halliwell returned, and Betty entered with the coffee-pot, and the three eggs. She then went round to take up David. He was unwilling to go, and clung to Hester.

"Ah, that's because he has seen the eggs here," cried Mrs. Halliwell.

"I have cooked him one," interposed Betty. "I talked to old Knight at the shop last night, till he gave me one into the shilling's worth, so I have boiled it for him. Missis have got her number all the same, I thought, and it will do Davy no harm. Come along, Master Davy."

It was Wednesday, Mr. Halliwell's day for going to the church, and he left at eleven o'clock. After that, Mrs. Halliwell came down with her things on. Little David had gone to Hester again, and she had him on her knee.

"I am obliged to go out on some business," she said. "I am sorry to leave you."

"Oh, I shall amuse myself very well, talking to Davy. Where are the children?"

"Their papa has set them to their lessons. Their education gets on very badly, Alfred is obliged to be out so much. If you hear them making a noise, just go and give it them, please. They are in the next room. Betty has the young one with her."

Mrs. Halliwell departed, and Hester and Davy sat making acquaintance with each other, till Betty went into the room with a full box of coal. She stumbled over a stool that stood in the way, and several lumps rolled on to the worn-out old carpet.

"Now then! bother the stool! Them children's always a-leaving something in the way. Our eyes don't get no younger, ma'am, nor we neither."

"No, that we don't, Betty. But you seem to be as active and well as ever."

"There's no chance to be otherwise here. Sometimes I threatens to leave it, but that's when I'm cross."

"Where have you left the little one, Betty?"

"Oh, I've stuck him up to the kitchen table, and tied him in a chair, with a tin baking-dish afore him, and a old iron spoon. That's what I always does with him when I'm busy; and he knocks away there for an hour and thinks it's music. How do you think master's looking, ma'am?"

"Pretty well, Betty. He was never over-strong to appearance. I think your mistress looks extremely ill."

"Missis has a deal to do, and she don't get good things enough to keep up her strength. Do you know where she's gone now?"

"No."

"She is gone out to give a music lesson. She has took to teaching the pianor."

"Teaching the piano!" uttered Hester.

"I don't know as I ought to have told," proceeded Betty, "for missis ain't fond of having it spoke of. Not that she cares, herself, but them Zinks gives themselves such airs. When they first heered of it, they came here, and made such an uproar as never was. Old Mother Zink——Ma'am," broke off Betty, "I hope you will excuse me, but I can't abide that old lady. She was a-pushing all her daughters at the head of master, in those old times, and she got her will and snapped him up for one of 'em, and now she comes here, a-turning up her nose, and says he doesn't pervide her daughter with things suitable to her station! Well, when things was at a low ebb with us, last autumn, missis pockets her pride, and begins to teach the pianor —which she has a great talent for music, folks say—and I think that little 'un, Archie, will have it too, if it goes by noise: hark at the rattle he's a-making."

Hester listened, and laughed.

"Well, ma'am, Mrs. Zink and Miss Fanny goes on at her as if it was a crime. But missis is wiser than to give in to 'em: the money's too useful. She has six pupils, and they pays her a pound a quarter apiece, which makes four-and-twenty pound in the year. If it hadn't been for that, ma'am, I don't think they could have kept me on this winter. Though I stops for a'most nothing: just a pair of shoes now and then, for I can't go barefoot."

"Then your mistress does do something, Betty, to aid matters."

"She does her share, what with one thing and another; she ain't idle. There's the making new things for the children, when they gets any; and the patching of the old, which never fails, for one must turn 'em out decent to church on a Sunday, a little like gentlefolk's children; and the ironing the fine things, which is above my rough hands; and the pies, which is above 'em too; and the giving these pianor lessons; and the nursing Davy and little Archie, who both cries to be took up, and I have not always got the time; besides her

visits round the parish. What with it all, missis don't sit upon a bed of lavender, with folded hands, and do nothing but enjoy the smell. My heart!" added Betty, in a different tone, "if here ain't Mrs. Zink!"

She went away to open the door, and Mrs. Zink entered with her daughter Fanny. Both were thinner, and Mrs. Zink had taken to wearing false hair, but otherwise they were little altered.

"Mrs. Halliwell has just stepped out," said Hester, when they had sat down.

"Ah!" grunted Mrs. Zink, "she has turned herself into a professional. What do you think of her so disgracing her family? I never heard of such a lowering proceeding for a clergyman's wife."

"Money is so much wanted here," rejoined Hester.

"You need not tell me that," retorted Mrs. Zink; "you don't know it as well as I do. I should just think money is wanted."

"What a lesson this house ought to be to us against getting married!" ejaculated Fanny Zink, lifting her eyes and hands.

"Yes," answered Hester, "unless we see our future more clearly before us than Alfred and Mabel did. I don't wonder at Mrs. Halliwell's giving music lessons. She does it from a praiseworthy motive."

"I don't care about the motive," wrathfully interrupted Mrs. Zink. "She ought to know better. If it were Fanny, now, who gave a little private instruction, it might be excused. Young—that is, unmarried—ladies often do such things for the sake of pocket-money. But Mabel is a clergyman's wife, and bound to keep up her dignity. As to her husband's permitting it, I cannot find words to express my indignation. He deserves to be tarred and feathered, as they serve the missionaries in those heathen settlements."

"Here he comes," remarked Hester, seeing her brother's approach from the window.

"Then, Fanny, we will go," said Mrs. Zink, rising hastily. "I don't care to come across him, Miss Halliwell, when my temper's up. One gets no satisfaction, reproaching him; and it puts me out of sorts for the rest of the day. Let me reproach him as I will, he keeps on that provoking meekness—wanting to reason, instead of quarrel. If I struck him, I expect it would be all the same. I never saw such an insensible man."

"Oh, no, Mrs. Zink, you are mistaken," replied Hester. "Mr. Halliwell is not insensible."

"Then he carries his 'Christian feeling,' as some folk call it, very far. Into affectation, and nothing less. You must come and drink tea with us one of these first afternoons, my dear."

"Thank you. If I have time. I shall not be here long."

"Ah! one has nothing but trouble in this world. There's Amy must come home now, for she has no other left. Good-day, my dear."

Mr. Halliwell came in, shivering and looking blue. "It is very cold, Hester," he remarked, as he leaned over the fire. "And the church felt so damp to-day."

"Had you anything to do? Any christenings or churchings?"

"No. I generally stop there the hour for nothing. The poor like to choose Sunday: it is their leisure day; and other people always give me notice."

"How is it, Alfred, you have three full services on the Sunday now? as I hear you have," she inquired. "You used to hold them only morning and evening."

"Yes; but one cannot please everybody. A few people wanted the evening service changed to the afternoon, but most of the parishioners were against it, and the malcontents appealed to the Bishop of Chelsbro'. He decided that, according to the rubric, it must be held in the afternoon, and he gave me the orders accordingly. But I was unwilling to forego the evening service; I thought I ought not: it is always so fully attended, so I kept it on. In the afternoon we never muster more than forty or fifty; families don't like coming out immediately after their dinner."

"How tired you must be when Sunday night comes!"

"Tolerably exhausted. Sometimes I feel as if I could go to bed and never get up again."

"Alfred, yours is a hard life."

"Do not set me against it," he returned; and his tones were, for the transient moment, so impassioned that, had Mrs. Zink heard it, she never, hereafter, would have accused him of want of feeling. "I know that it must be good for me, or it would not be inflicted: and I know that I am being borne up in it, for, of my own strength, I never could *do* and *go through*. When a repining spirit steals over me, I compare my condition with that of others less fortunate than myself: there are numbers so, even of my own calling. There is a poor curate in a rural parish—Camley, three miles off—a most deserving man. He has only seventy pounds a-year, a wife, a mother, and eight young children, all to be supported out of it: and he is expected, out of this, to give away to the poor, as I have to do. I have seen him on a week-day with scarcely a bit of shoe to his foot. Hester, when I feel inclined to murmur, I think of him, and am thankful."

He was preparing to leave the room to hear the children's lessons —not that many could have been learnt, from the outrageous noise they had kept up—when Betty burst into it, nearly running against him. "Master! master!" she exclaimed, "here's Mr. Cockburn's footman without his hat, and all his hair standing on end. He says his master's took in a fit, and Mrs. Cockburn says will you go up?"

Mr. Halliwell hastened out, and Hester was again alone. At one o'clock Mrs. Halliwell came in.

"They are saying in the town that Mr. Cockburn is dead," she exclaimed. "How fearfully sudden."

"And like enough it is so," added Betty, "for St. Paul's bell is a tolling out."

All doubt was over when the Vicar returned. Mr. Cockburn had been found on the floor of his study in a fit of apoplexy. Remedies failed to arouse him, and in a short time he was quite gone.

"Oh, Hester!" murmured her brother, deeply affected, "I have envied him in life. But better toil on, as I do, than be surprised, thus suddenly, in my ease, and taken before my Maker, perhaps unprepared."

CHAPTER XXI.

A SECRET BARGAIN.

A FEELING arose in Chelson in favour of Mr. Halliwell, that he might have the vacant living; and a petition was got up, unknown to him, praying for it. His own parishioners said they should be grieved to lose him, but would support it for his own sake. After a few days it came to their Vicar's ears. He would not allow himself to hope, or dwell upon the change of prospect, and shook his head at the bare notion of being suddenly exalted to fourteen hundred a-year. "I might grow proud," he said; "I might forget to be humble; though it would be welcome for the sake of educating my children."

Not so said Mabel. She was in high spirits, and lost herself in momentary visions of having already effected the desired change. "The rectory is such a capital house, Hester," she would say; "and, oh, what a blessed relief it will be from our life of labour! Whatever shall we do with old Betty? She would be out of place there. Pension her off?"

"Make her major-domo over the rest," laughed Hester.

It was Mr. Halliwell who buried the deceased rector. The curate of St. Paul's was the Reverend George Dewisson, a young man very unpopular in the parish. He was a brother of that Miss Dewisson who had formerly set her cap so strenuously at Alfred Halliwell. When a suggestion was made that perhaps he, George Dewisson might be the newly-appointed rector, Chelson was up in arms. He was an austere man of uncertain temper, never cordial with anyone and harsh to the poor, a bad reader, and it was well known that he bought his sermons. St. Paul's protested it would not have him; it had had quite enough of him as curate.

"Are you acquainted with the gentleman who has the living in his gift?" inquired Hester of her brother—"this Mr. Burnley."

"Mr. Burnley is only the steward," he replied. "The living is in the gift of the Earl of Seaford."

The Earl of Seaford! Hester was thunderstruck at the answer.

With reference to the living, she had never heard any name mentioned but Mr. Burnley's.

"I had no idea the Seafords possessed property in this part of the country," she said, almost doubting the information.

"The Earl bought it some time ago from Lord Westnor, who ruined himself gambling, and joined his son in cutting off the entail. I should think ill-luck goes with the property," added Mr. Halliwell; "for Lord Seaford, they say, will be obliged to sell it again. His sons have all turned out wild; but Lord Sale the most so. He has drained and nearly ruined his father."

"Is Lord Seaford ever here?"

"He is here now—so I heard yesterday; but he lives chiefly abroad. Too poor, now, to live in England."

Hester Halliwell was not given to wild schemes, but one was coming into her brain then. That she would find her way to Lord Seaford, recall herself to his recollection, and boldly ask him to give the living to her brother: ask for it *in recompense*, if other persuasions failed, for the injury inflicted on her by the Lady Georgina. Aye, in such a cause, she would not mind telling him that.

"Alfred," she said, "do you know what I am thinking of? That I will go to Lord Seaford, and ask him to give you the living."

"Well done, Hester!" returned Mr. Halliwell, the ingenuous colour flushing his pale cheeks at the words. "What presumptuous thing will you do next?"

"If the worst comes to the worst, and I get a refusal, you will only be where you are now. I can urge the wishes of Chelson as a plea for my request."

The following day found Hester at Hawsford, the Earl's seat. She had engaged a fly to take her, for it was six miles off; and she went driving up to the principal entrance. They were some time answering the man's summons, and then the door was unlocked and unbarred.

"Curious they should lock up the house," thought Hester, "if the Earl is here."

A woman appeared, looking like a housekeeper. "I wish to see Lord Seaford," said Hester.

"His lordship is gone, ma'am. He left late last night."

There was a disappointment! All the expense of the fly for nothing!

"But if it is any business, ma'am, his steward, Mr. Burnley, lives in the village close by. My lord leaves most things to him."

As Hester was there, she thought she might as well see the steward, though she could not urge the matter upon him as she would have done on Lord Seaford. Mr. Burnley's house was the only good house in the village, so far as she saw; and she was handed into the office. It was one of two rooms opening into each other, with a separate door to each leading into the passage of the house. It was

the back room that she was shown into; and Mr. Burnley, a man of gentlemanly manners, went to her from the front one, through the intervening door, which he pushed to but did not close.

He was very polite. Regretted his inability to comply with her request, for he respected much the merits of the Rev. Mr. Halliwell. Lord Seaford had received the petition in his favour most graciously, and would have been delighted to comply with its prayer had the living not been promised.

"Is it really promised?" asked Hester, wistfully.

"I may say it is given," replied Mr. Burnley. "The new rector will be announced to-morrow."

Of course there was no more to be urged, and Hester left the room. Mr. Burnley followed, to attend her to the door, but a young man encountered them in the passage, apparently in a pressing hurry, seized Mr. Burnley by the button-hole, and took him back into the room. So Hester said "Good-day," and went on alone. At that very moment, the street door was pushed open, and she saw old Mr. Dewisson scraping his shoes on the scraper outside, the father of the late Mr. Cockburn's curate. He was a lawyer and electioneering agent in Chelson, seventy years of age, but as active as a boy, with a rosy, clear complexion, and snow-white hair. Hester did not care that he should see her, and go back and tell Chelson that she had been personally soliciting for her brother—and her business he would not fail to guess—so, on the impulse of the moment, she glided in at the open door of the front office, until he should have passed.

She heard him enter and wipe his shoes upon the mat, and she then heard the young man come out of the back office, and leave the house. Mr. Burnley also came out of it, and shook hands with Mr. Dewisson in the passage. "I have been expecting you this hour," he said.

"Better late than never," answered the old lawyer. "I had some business to attend to before I could get away. The Earl left last night, I suppose?"

"Yes. He is ploughing the waves to France by this time, if he could catch the morning's mail-train to Dover. Walk in."

To Hester's great horror—which is as fresh upon her now as it felt then—the door she had just slipped in at was pulled sharply to, of course by Mr. Burnley, and the key turned in it. So she was locked in. What to do she did not know. She looked at the window, and had a momentary thought of getting out of that, but found she should have pitched upon spikes. Next came a wild idea of trying the chimney, but even if she reached the top and the roof, how was she to get down? So she had to remain where she was, trusting to chance, and to someone's unturning the key, and sat shaking behind the door. As to going brazenly into the back office and avowing herself to Mr. Burnley in the face of old Dewisson, she would rather have risked the spikes.

She did not hear what was said at first in the next room, and tried not to hear the rest, but there was no avoiding it; for the voices, lowered in the commencement to the confidential tones of state secrets, were gradually raised.

"How much do you say is to be kept back?" were the first distinct words, in Mr. Dewisson's voice.

"A thousand," answered Mr. Burnley.

"Which will leave my son four hundred a-year. That's less than I suggested. There's nothing very great about that."

"But there is about fourteen hundred. Under any circumstances but these he might whistle for so rich a living. You know, Dewisson, that you have no interest to get him one of half the value. He might starve out his life upon a pittance, as poor Halliwell does. You are aware of the petition that came in?"

"Aware of it! Chelson's full of it. Thinks it's going to succeed. I say, Burnley, though, the Earl's is not a bad life."

"He is sixty-six, and knows something of dissipation still. He may fill his years, three-score-and-ten; he will not go much beyond them. And then your son comes into the full income."

"And then George comes into the full income," slowly repeated Mr. Dewisson. "Well, it is a good day's work for both the Earl and him: each gets his turn served. But I say, Burnley, what will the parish think of George? They'll call him a miser. Holding a living of fourteen hundred a-year, and living up to four of it!"

"Oh—he gives the surplus to the poor, you know."

They both laughed, and Hester thought, by the sound, seemed to be rising. She shook excessively as they came along the passage.

"Burnley," cried Mr. Dewisson, in passing the door, "we must meet to celebrate this: when will you come and dine?"

She did not hear the answer; they had reached the front door then, and the sound of the voices escaped. Mr. Burnley returned, and unlocked the door as he passed and unlatched it. Hester squeezed herself up to nothing, in her terror, and her heart stood still.

He did not go in: she is thankful for it yet: but went on to the back office, and shut himself in. Not another moment waited Hester. She twisted herself into the passage, noiselessly opened the front door, and flew down the street towards the inn where the flyman was baiting his horse, as if a ghost had been after her. Mr. Dewisson and his gig were already at a distance.

Now the reader may be in doubt whether this incident really occurred to Hester Halliwell. *It did:* the conversation has been related word for word; and George Dewisson still holds his rich living.

Hester had leisure to think over what she had been a witness to as she drove back to Chelson; and, to her, the bargain appeared to be a sinful one. When the fly stopped at its destination, Mrs. Halliwell's face, full of joyous hope, appeared above the window-blind,

and the children came dancing out. Her brother looked up from his warm arm-chair when she went in.

"Hester!" cried Mabel, in her hasty way, "you don't speak."

"Perhaps I had better not speak: for I have only bad news to give you."

"Let us know the worst at once," she cried. "We must know it shortly, anyway."

"The Earl has quitted Hawsford. He left last night for France, and the living is given away."

"Given!"

"Yes. I saw the steward."

"To whom?" asked her brother.

"He did not say," was Hester's answer. For not even to him would she breathe a hint of the dishonourable secret she had (so to say) dishonourably heard. "But not to you."

Mabel sank down on a chair, poor thing, and despair, if ever Hester saw it, settled itself on her face. She had buoyed up her hopes unreasonably. "Toil! and trouble! and illness! and heart-burning! and care!" she murmured. "Must it go on with us for ever?"

Her husband's countenance had fallen, and a red spot, the symbol of raised expectancy, shone on his cheek, proving that he *had* hoped for success. For one moment he bowed his head upon his hands; the next, he rose and spoke, his voice calm as usual, and his face pale again:

"It is the will of God, Mabel, that we should still bear our cross. Let us welcome it."

"If such a meek-spirited temper is not enough to try the patience of Job!" impetuously responded Mrs. Halliwell.

The following day the new rector was announced—The Reverend George Dewisson. St. Paul's rebelled, so far as words could go, but there was no remedy, and they had to sit down and put up with him. Amy Zink came to tea that evening, the last of Hester's stay. The old aunt was dead, so Amy had returned to her mother's. Hester looked at her with interest: a meek, gentle-spirited creature, who seemed, as Mabel afterwards expressed it, to have been "kept under."

"Amy," her sister said to her, "it is a great shame old aunt left you nothing."

"She gave me fifty pounds the day before she died," responded Amy. "For mourning, she said. Of course I have not spent it. I made some old do, and I gave the money to mamma."

"To mamma! Then you'll never see it again," cried Mabel. "I should have put it in my pocket. Aunt ought to have left you a sufficient income."

"She said her nephew Braybrook had more claim than I."

"That's nonsense," returned Mabel. "He can't have. You have worn out your best years, bearing with her fractiousness. You don't know how necessary money is."

"I think I do," answered Amy. "Mamma has been asking me, ever since I came home, how I am to be kept."

"And she'll ask you that every day of your life, Amy, so prepare for it. I wish I could afford to have you here, you would be so useful."

It happened that Hester went upstairs in the course of the evening to fetch something wanted for the children. She was looking for it when a timid, humble voice was heard behind her. "If you please, Miss Halliwell, may I speak to you?"

"Is it you, Amy? Yes, of course. What is it?"

"I do not think I ought to remain at home," said Amy, with a very vivid blush. "Mamma says everything is so dear, and—and—I don't like to hear her say it. It does make me feel so uncomfortable."

"Yes?" rejoined Hester.

"I was thinking that perhaps you might want a teacher in your school: or might know of some other school wanting one. I should be so thankful to come to you. Indeed, I would not presume upon Mabel's being related to you, in the way of expecting to sit with you after school hours. I would be quite humble, and be content to be the lowest of all your teachers, and sit by myself without fire—or anything. If you could only try me!"

Hester wondered. Had she been used to "sitting without fire?" "We are not in want of a teacher just now," she answered, in kind tones, "our vacancies are all filled. Are you"—she spoke hesitatingly—"qualified for a teacher?"

"I am a thorough English scholar," returned Amy; "I understand the globes, and am a good arithmetician; but I cannot play on any instrument. Aunt said she knew I should be stupid at it, and she did not let me learn. I can teach everything in sewing, plain work and fancy work, and I could be useful in the kitchen if you wanted me, especially in cooking for the sick. I can draw a little: my aunt let me learn for a year when I was fifteen."

Hester smiled. "You would have patience with young children, I should think?"

"Indeed, yes," replied Amy. "I have much patience naturally, and living with my aunt has given me more, for she was extremely irritable. No one else would stay with her, not a servant; they would not come near her room. I would strive to do my very best, Miss Halliwell. And I would not ask for any salary: not for a year or two, until my clothes begin to wear out. I have a good wardrobe at present."

"I will bear you in remembrance, Amy," was Hester's promise. And she did so.

Hester returned home, and the school duties went on as usual at Halliwell House. It was a flourishing establishment now; at least,

sufficiently so to remove anxiety and obviate the necessity of letting their drawing-room Not long after this period they were to receive a surprise—no less than a visit from Mrs. Pepper. She arrived at their house with two children: Jessie, an infant, and Thomas, a lad some years older. Of Mrs. Pepper's large family these were all that remained. Several had died older than Thomas, and some between him and his sister. Two servants attended her: a man and a coloured nurse. She was strangely altered! not the slightest trace remained of the young and pretty Jane Halliwell. Hester would look at her by the hour, and be unable to trace a single feature. She was in an extremely precarious state of health, and a conviction stole over Hester that she had only come home to die.

Tom was the romp of the school-room, and was always escaping bounds and rushing into it, to the excessive delight of the young ladies. He was a round-faced, chubby urchin, wonderfully demure before his mamma and aunts, but a very little demon of mischief elsewhere.

"Jane, you ought to have come home years ago," exclaimed Hester to her sister. "It was really wicked of you so to neglect yourself."

"I did so dread the voyage alone, and Major Pepper never could obtain leave. He is a very useful officer."

"You must stay at least two years, now you are here, to get up your strength at all."

"Not two years. I shall limit my stay to half the time. And I shall have much on my hands. First, I must look for a superior, comfortable school for Tom. Then there will be all the visits. You came first, you see, which was natural; and there will be Alfred and Mary, and the Major's relatives. He has so many, and they are so scattered. Some in London, some in Yorkshire, and in other places; all want a visit from me. I think I shall go to Mary next to you. I long to see her. Hers is a very happy marriage, is it not?"

"Very. Dr. Goring is a delightful man, and a fond husband. You and Mary have been fortunate in that respect. Nice children, too, are Mary's."

"And their circumstances are easy?"

"Quite so. Dr. Goring's practice is good, and then Mary has her annuity of three hundred a-year. We wrote you word about it, you know."

"Yes. It was a lucky thing. You and Lucy are doing well too, Hester?"

"Now we are; but, Jane, you don't know what a struggle and anxiety it has been. Alfred is the worst off. I wish something could be done to aid him."

"I wonder whether the Major has no interest with any people who have livings to bestow?" said Mrs. Pepper. "I must talk the matter over with Alfred, and see about it when I get back to India."

Mrs. Pepper, poor lady, never lived to see her brother, or to go back. When her visit terminated at Halliwell House, she went to stay with some of her husband's relatives at Clapham : Mr. Pepper, an old bachelor and banker in the city, and his half-sister, Miss Oldstage. From them she purposed going to Middlebury, to Mrs. Goring's, but alas ! she was taken worse at Mr. Pepper's. Her disorder, which was really nothing but weakness, assumed suddenly a more alarming phase ; Hester and Lucy hastened to her, and in a few days, before her relatives and friends could believe it, she had sunk into death.

They were sad tidings to write to her husband : they were sad tidings for all. What would be done with her children ? was the exclamation of more than one. But about that arose little embarrassment, for means were abundant : the young boy was placed at school, and Miss Oldstage undertook to bring up the infant girl.

CHAPTER XXII.

A WOODEN LEG.

A SERIOUS misfortune fell, about this time, upon Mrs. Copp. Strictly speaking, it was upon her son, but he did not care for it half so much as she did. The Captain—as he had long been—was with his vessel in the Chinese seas, when it was attacked by a piratical junk. A desperate engagement ensued, and the Captain—we must borrow his own words—" licked the devils into shivers." But alas, though the victory was glorious, poor Captain Copp was wounded in the leg, which was less glorious, for it resulted, later, in its being taken off He came home, sold his share in the vessel, of which he was part owner, gathered together what other odds and ends of means he was possessed of, the interest of which was sufficient to live upon, and retired from the merchant service. Mrs. Copp spent a whole month in groans and lamentations : it was so heartsickening to see her fine boy, in the very prime of life, viz., forty years, pegging about upon a wooden leg. Of course he would make his home with her ; of that she never entertained a doubt ; and when her grief subsided, she commenced various preparations and changes accordingly. Captain Copp rendered them futile. He went a long journey ; it was to pay a visit to an old ship-comrade at Coastdown. He fell in love with the little fishing village, determined to establish himself there, and took a cottage off-hand. Aunt Copp was violently wrath, and stormed much, and she went storming up to London, where the Captain then was, buying furniture for his new home. She could do nothing with the Captain as to changing his determination, and she went down and stayed with her nieces at Halliwell House. The Captain occasionally made his appearance by the omnibus ; and Mrs.

Copp told him to let the furniture-buying alone, and she would see to it. The Captain certainly was displaying all the proverbial wisdom of a sailor in his purchases, securing the most incongruous articles, and ordering them packed and sent off before his mother could catch sight of them, and she looked after him pretty sharply.

"He'll be wanting a servant," said Aunt Copp one day to Hester; "someone who can manage for him. He has no more idea of management than an owl."

"I think I know a young woman who would suit him. She lived with us more than three years, and——"

"Then she won't do," snapped Aunt Copp, who had never recovered her temper since the Captain first took the Coastdown cottage. "I'm not going to leave Sam with a giddy young woman. He must have an old one."

"She is neither young nor giddy, Aunt Copp," replied Hester. "It is several years since she lived with us, and she was not a young girl then. You have heard me speak of her—Sarah. She was with us when that affair happened about Mrs. Nash's handkerchiefs. She left us to be married, but something that Sarah did not like came to light about the man, and she would not have him. She has been in service since, but is out of place now."

"Perhaps she would not leave London to live in a nasty wretched fishing hole that has not ten decent houses in it," grunted Aunt Copp. "No one in their senses would. I wish Sam's other leg had been off before he had gone and found it out."

"I will send and tell her to call here," said Hester. "She is a thoroughly good servant—steady, honest and straightforward. If she has a fault, it is that she is free with her tongue."

"She and Sam will have some tussles, then; for he won't stand that. But that's their look-out."

That same evening Sarah came: a most respectable-looking woman, now getting on for forty. Captain Copp happened to be there, and pronounced that she looked a "likely one."

"What can you do?" demanded Aunt Copp, giving her a keen look.

"Anything that's wanted," answered Sarah.

"Now, mother," interrupted the Captain, "let me have the overhauling of the young woman: she's to serve me, not you. Can you cook a beefsteak, lass?"

"Yes, sir. Broiled, or fried, or in the Dutch-oven afore the fire; just as you may like to have it."

"And swab the decks?"

"If that means scouring rooms—yes, I can," answered Sarah.

"Can you wash out a shirt and iron it?"

"I have done plenty of 'em, sir."

"And sewed on buttons?"

"Many a dozen."

"You'll do!" cried Captain Copp. "What's the figure a month? I'm not rich, mind."

"Do!" screamed Mrs. Copp; "you are out of your senses, Sam. You are not engaging a sailor. A servant's different from an able-bodied. You have asked her nothing. Why, if you go to hire servants after that fashion, you'll get a pretty set about you. Young woman, are you a particularly steady character? If not, you had better confess it; for I could not think of leaving any other with a young man like my son."

"I don't call this gentleman young," returned Sarah. "He looks as if he'd never see fifty again."

Captain Copp really did. What with his weather-beaten countenance, its scars, and his wooden leg, he looked ten years more than his age. They all laughed at Sarah's remark—none more heartily than the Captain himself. Mrs. Copp told her she was mistaken.

"Well," observed Sarah, whom the laughing had not disturbed in the least, "whether I'm with an old one or a young one, I never was unsteady yet, and I'm not a-going to begin now."

"You and your master will be in the house alone; there will be no mistress," said Mrs. Copp, "so you must be up to the management."

"It's all one to me whether there's a mistress, or whether there isn't," repeated Sarah. "I know what my place is, and the work that's necessary in a house, and if I'm hired, I'll undertake to do it."

But Mrs. Copp had a great many more questions to ask, and suggestions to offer; and she then told Sarah to come the next evening for a final answer, and to settle the question of wages, intimating that *she* gave only eight pounds a-year to her servant in the country. The Captain wondered why Sarah could not have her answer then, and when she left he pegged across the room with his wooden leg, followed her, and closed the door after him.

"Hello, lass! hi! young woman! here! Don't steer off so fast."

"Sir?" said Sarah, returning.

"Don't you pay attention to the womenfolk in there. They said there'd be no missus; they'd like to frighten you; there will be one."

"Then I suppose you are going to be married, sir?" said Sarah, who generally spoke out what she thought.

"That's just it, lass."

"Well, it won't matter to me," observed Sarah. "I'd as soon serve two people as one; and sooner, I think, for the sake of more company. We should have been uncommon dull, sir, by our two selves."

"All right," nodded the Captain. "She is not one as will swear at you, I promise that. And, I say" (with a jerk of the head towards the dining-room), "if they want to beat your pay down, let 'em. I'll square it up with you."

The Captain pegged back again, and Sarah departed. She appeared

again the following evening, in pursuance of her agreement. Mrs. Copp had been preparing a long string of lectures, which chiefly turned upon morality of conduct, to the extreme amusement of Lucy Halliwell, who knew Sarah was not one to need it. Hester sat apart, sewing, with Amy Zink, who had long been an efficient and patient teacher at Halliwell House.

"I need not remark, young woman," proceeded Aunt Copp, "how necessary it will be for you to keep yourself select, and to yourself. His place is the parlour, and yours is the kitchen. Sailors are particularly loose in their ideas, and with nobody in the house but you and your master, the neighbours will ——"

"But there will be somebody else," interrupted Sarah, who had no idea that the information volunteered to her by the Captain was to be kept secret. "There is to be a mistress!"

"Where did you hear that?" demanded Mrs. Copp.

"He told me—master, that is to be—when he followed me out of the room last night."

"He meant me," said Mrs. Copp, majestically. "But that will be but for a short time, just to get his house set to rights. My home is in Liverpool."

"Oh, no, not you, ma'am," replied Sarah; "a wife. He is going to marry."

"He did not say that?" cried the astonished Mrs. Copp.

"Yes, he did," answered Sarah. "He told me I was a-going to have a mistress, but I needn't be afeared, for she was not one as would swear at me. So I asked him outright whether he meant that he was a-going to take a wife, and he said yes, he did mean it."

What Aunt Copp's wrath might have brought her to, it is impossible to say, for she fully believed this to be an invention of Sarah's to escape further lecturing; but at that moment Amy Zink threw her hands up to her face, and burst into hysterical sobs.

"What on earth's the matter now?" cried Aunt Copp, turning round.

"Amy," cried Lucy; "Amy! Are you ill?"

Amy sobbed on, emitting also sundry moans and ejaculations; and Hester, after a few moments, seemed to understand. Perhaps she had been more observant than the others; her suspicions had once been half aroused.

"Amy," she said, "compose yourself. Samuel has asked you to be his wife, has he not?"

"O-o-o-o-h!" groaned Amy. "Don't be angry with him, please! Don't turn me out!"

"Has he asked you?" quickly added Lucy.

"Yes, he has!" returned Amy, sobbing until she choked. "Indeed, Mrs. Copp, I'll do everything for him! I'll serve him every minute of my days. Indeed, Miss Halliwell, Miss Lucy, I never *thought* of such a thing as his choosing me till he had done it,

and then I trembled so I couldn't believe my ears. It was last Sunday afternoon when the servants were out, and you sent me into the kitchen to show him how the new cooking-range acted. Oh! what shall I do?"

Aunt Copp sat down, completely cowed. Never had Sam taken so iniquitous an advantage of her. The settling himself at Coastdown was play compared with this.

When he appeared the next day, she attacked him violently, and asked how he came to do it.

"Well," answered the Captain, equably, "it occurred to me that I might as well splice with somebody before I went down there, and I thought she'd do as well as another. And a sight better than some; for, let me blow off as sharp as I will, she's not one to blow back again."

"Why, she's older than you!"

"Don t know anything about that," answered the Captain, "and don't care. Very like she may be; but she doesn't look as old as me, by one half. Oh, we shall do, mother."

Aunt Copp went back forthwith to Liverpool, in dreadful dudgeon, and Captain Copp fixed the day of his marriage with Amy for a quiet morning at the neighbouring church. The day before the wedding, Miss Oldstage called at Halliwell House with Thomas and Jessie Pepper, Thomas a growing youth, with a round face and a colour. The children were orphans now, Colonel Pepper having died in India the previous year. They were left very well off. Miss Oldstage stayed to dine and take an early tea, and they were about to depart when Captain Copp, who had come in, gave an unceremonious invitation to young Tom Pepper to stop and attend his wedding on the morrow. Tom was immediately wild to do so, and said his Aunt Priscilla and Jessie might go home without him. So it was settled that he should remain for the night.

"What are you to be, Tom?" asked Lucy, when his aunt had left.

"I am to be a soldier," answered Tom. "It is decided."

"What! go into the army?"

Tom nodded his head in glee.

"I am very sorry, then, Tom," said Lucy. "You may get shot."

"Papa did not," answered the lad. "And think of all the engagements he was in, Aunt Lucy; especially those bloody battles of the Punjab. Wasn't Chillianwallah a stunner for slaughter!"

"Miss Oldstage says she has talked herself hoarse, striving to persuade you to be a minister," continued Lucy.

"Do you know why she wants me?" answered young Tom. "There's a fellow always going there when my guardian's out—a thin scarecrow of a Methodist parson—and he's trying to persuade Aunt Priscilla to desert church, and to go to that little round chapel of his, which he calls Jecoliah."

"For shame, Tom!" interrupted Lucy, putting on a grave face, while Captain Copp slapped his leg in ecstasy.

"Aunt Priscilla tells him she shall never turn round from church on a Sunday, but she goes to his chapel sometimes on the week-day prayer meeting evening. She took me and Jessie one evening. My! you should have heard the singing! It gave us both the stomach-ache."

"Tom," interrupted Lucy again, "I will not hear you speak against any religious sect, whatever they may be. It is very wrong: it is like making a joke of religion."

"I don't speak against religion, Aunt Lucy," interrupted the boy, "I know that is wrong, but I shall speak against that Brother Straithorn. He is always worrying Aunt Priscilla to make me a minister—Sparkinson says it's because he'd like to get the training of me. And I don't speak against him because he is a Methodist parson, but because he's an old hypocrite, and I know he is."

"How do you know it?"

"I'm sure of it," logically answered Tom Pepper, "and Gus Sparkinson knows it too. He's a sneak, that's what he is. He comes sneaking to the house when my guardian, Uncle Pepper, is out, but he dare not show his face there when he is at home. I don't like sneaks."

"Nor I, Tom," said the sailor. "Is your uncle kind to you?"

"Very. Rather stiff and particular, but then you know he is old. He was a great many years older than papa. And Aunt Pris is three years younger than papa."

"What brings her name Oldstage?" cried Captain Copp. "I forget all about it. Why isn't it Pepper, if she is their sister?"

"The mother was married twice," explained Lucy. "On her first husband's death, she married a Mr. Oldstage."

"My guardian wants me to go into his bank," continued Tom. "But I can't, for I'd rather be a soldier than anything in the world."

"Stick to it, lad," cried Captain Copp. "My father wanted me to be anything but a sailor, but I couldn't be persuaded. I had a sailor's craft in my head, and you have a soldier's."

"Papa directed, in his will, that I was to be allowed my choice of a profession," added Tom, "so Aunt Priscilla and Brother Straithorn can't do me out of it."

The following morning rose, and the wedding was as quiet as could be. Tom Pepper and Lucy (who put off her deep mourning for the day) went to church with them, and a seafaring friend of the Captain's, named Luttrell. The two Captains when they appeared, both having come down in a coach together, proved to be dressed exactly alike, in blue coats and trousers, crimson waistcoats and sea-green neckerchiefs, tied in a sailor's knot. The coachman had been presented with a bunch of sea-green streamers for his button-hole. The same coach took them to church. Captain Copp (out of some wrong-headed idea of politeness, he having been its hirer) obstinately persisted, both

in going and returning, in putting the four others inside, and mounting himself and his wooden leg on to the box beside the driver, to the timid confusion of Amy and indignation of Lucy, who remonstrated with him in vain. Tom Pepper was for mounting the roof, but Lucy did over-rule that.

So Captain Copp's nuptial knot was tied, and he and his wife Amy left for Coastdown, where Sarah had preceded them.

(*To be continued.*)

MORNING SONG.

AWAKE, my love—the city lies
All bathed in golden fairy mist;
It was transformed to Paradise,
By magic, when we kissed—
Yet every moment something dies
From the enchanted streets and skies.

Awake! no lark or thrush is here—
But noisy sparrows in your square
Chirp, flout and flutter, peck and peer
About the branches bare;
And careless of the time of year,
Your shrill canary storms the ear.

There are no meadows here, nor dower
Of roses on this young March day;
I cannot gather flower on flower
For you to throw away—
So wear these violets for an hour,
Though brought from market, not from bower.

It's March, there are no roses sweet,
It's London, where no fields are green—
Yet could these make life more complete
For me, my rose, my Queen,
Since you can make the common street
Turn to a garden, when we meet?

And you? What maid by shepherd e'er
Was better loved than I love you?
Awake—and show the day how rare
A flower in London grew.
Of woods and fields and pastures fair
What do you know—what do I care?

E. NESBIT.

MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT.

IT was in the days when female authorship was a commodity at as low a value in society as conger-eel in the fish-market. A woman might be beautiful, might be witty, might dip her fair hands as deeply as she pleased into the troubled pool of politics, but she might not meddle with literature in the way of producing literature herself. If she used her pen for anything besides writing letters of twelve pages, she was at once regarded with suspicion by her own sex; she was labelled "adventuress," or "woman of doubtful character," or "eccentric female," while men at once looked upon her with eyes that had a half-pitying, half-contemptuous familiarity in their gaze. Moreover these were the days when a woman, if she wished to be considered a respectable woman, might not stand alone, or do anything to gain her own livelihood unless it were to use her needle. It was just in the middle of these days that Mary Wollstonecraft had the misfortune to be born.

Mr. Wollstonecraft, Mary's father, was most literally and emphatically a rolling stone that gathered no moss. He was always trying his hand at new ways of gaining money, and never succeeding in any. Now it was agriculture, now it was commerce which employed his energies; but be it what it might, he never prospered in the walk of life he entered upon. Hither and thither he wandered from town to country, sometimes dwelling in crowded city alleys, and sometimes in a rural cottage; and hither and thither his wife and numerous family had to follow him. He was, moreover, a rolling stone with a good many sharp angles, such as a very irritable temper, and not strictly temperate habits, and these, in his various rollings, came into not very pleasant or comfortable contact with the inhabitants of his home. As for Mrs. Wollstonecraft, she was a woman not badly furnished as to brains, but she had none of the quiet strength, or depth of religious principle which makes a woman a home queen. She had little influence over either her husband or her children, and besides all, her mental energies were quite sufficiently taxed by the effort of making the scanty means she had stretch elastic-like to meet the household expenses.

It was little wonder that in such a home as this a clever girl like Mary Wollstonecraft grew up without any great reverence for the sanctity of domestic ties. The child was quite intelligent enough soon to notice what the wedded life of her parents was, and instinctively she drew her own conclusions from it. In after days these conclusions, no doubt, had their share in an important degree in shaping her life's story. Mary's religion was only put into her mind as a form; it did not impregnate her character, or permeate the

deeper springs of her being. She was endowed with many fine qualities by nature, but she never learned to bring them into tune with the Gospel music. As for her general education, it was not a very extensive one in early youth, though her mother seems to have done as much as she could towards it; but as she grew older, the active, inquiring mind of the girl rebelled against the semi-dimness in which she was kept; she insisted on a wider mental cultivation, and after a while obtained it. She got access to many books not generally read by women in those days, and to some that would not be very healthy reading for girls either of that day or of this; her mind was widened by this contact with other and greater spirits, and her intellectual horizon was increased, but the tree of knowledge bore for her a mingled fruit of good and evil.

At eighteen Mary Wollstonecraft rose in entire and complete mutiny against the tyranny of her father and against the wretchedness of the life she led at home, where she was literally starved both bodily and mentally; with a resolute effort she emancipated herself from all parental restraint, and determined to stand entirely alone. Such a step needed no small degree of strength of character and force of will in those days, when girls, in all classes of society, were kept in much tighter leading-strings than they are now. To Mary Wollstonecraft's honour be it said, that though she left her parents' roof, she was never wanting in filial affection; her departure from their house caused no rupture between her and her father and mother, and her earnings, however scanty they might be, were always at their service; when age and sickness overtook them she came to their side. Her father continued throughout his life the same man as he had been at the beginning, but with the exception of insisting on quitting his house, and choosing her own mode of living, Mary was never wanting in a daughter's duty towards him; her love for her brothers and sisters was always strong and faithful, and she never failed to help and befriend any of them whenever it lay in her power.

Mary Wollstonecraft opened a small school, offering to take pupils on comparatively low terms. The young school-mistress, however, found that her self-chosen path was a very up-hill and stony one. Her youth made parents and guardians regard her with mistrust; she had no references to show which would speak for her character and respectability, she had not money enough to fit up her school handsomely, and so to give it an attractive appearance; only a few pupils, therefore, gathered round her, and she could hardly earn sufficient to cover her most necessary expenses. We can take a hasty photograph of her at this period. A tall, girlish figure in a shabby dress; rich auburn hair, that was always somewhat tumbled and disorderly, as though its owner had but little time for occupying herself with the wavy shining coil; a handsome face, with a forehead too high and broad for a Grecian Venus; luminous eyes, in which the lamp of intellect burned brightly; a pretty mouth the red lips of which were

firmer set than the lips of young maidens in their teens used to be, and round the corners of which care had already begun to draw one or two faint lines; a resolute, bell-shaped chin—it was a face to be admired, but a face to be still more thought of than admired, a face where genius was waking-up, and where passion might be sleeping.

It was a hard struggle with life which Mary Wollstonecraft fought in these early days. With her brilliant young intellect all aglow, and crying out for more congenial work, she had to chain herself to the drudgery of teaching dull children the first rudiments of education; it was grind, grind, grind, from morning to evening at the mill of knowledge, and with very little to show as the result in the way of improvement among her pupils or pecuniary gain for herself. Even when the school work was over she could not enjoy any mental rest and refreshment in the way of congenial reading, or a little rational amusement, for her whole time had then to be given to minute domestic details, and to the difficult daily problem of how to make one shilling go as far as two.

At this time the difficulties and perplexities of Mary Wollstonecraft's position were increased by the unfortunate circumstances which happened to her sister. Eliza Wollstonecraft, the second daughter, eager to escape from a gloomy, joyless home, where life for a young girl was something worse than stagnation, had made a hasty marriage with a man she did not love. In the days of courtship he had seemed her humble adorer; she had flattered herself that she should lead an easy life at his side; but a few months of marriage had shown her that she had made a terrible mistake; the fond bridegroom had developed into the most exacting and most brutally cruel of masters. Eliza, in whom there seems to have been always a touch of something very like insanity, wrote to Mary, telling her that if she could not be freed from her husband's fetters she should destroy herself. The alarm of the always affectionate sister was at once aroused, and her indignation against Eliza's husband blazed up hotly. She assisted the wife to escape secretly from her husband's house, and kept her concealed from him. Eliza's support and Eliza's troubles were added to the burden Mary had to carry. The difference between husband and wife was afterwards in some measure patched up; but throughout her life the misfortunes of this sister cast more or less of a shadow upon Mary, whose love and sympathy for her were unwearying; though Eliza's violent temper and suspicious nature seem often to have made her worthy of neither.

It was at this period that Mary Wollstonecraft formed a close friendship with a brother and sister called George and Fanny Blood. They were people of great intellectual culture, who had become very strongly permeated with the school of opinion which heralded the approach of the French Revolution in Europe, which had in it a large mixture of both gold and dross; they led Mary to the stream at which they had drunk, and she imbibed largely from it. From

henceforth her religious faith grew misty and wavering, and she began to hold new theories on certain social questions.

George Blood soon drifted into the position of declared lover of Mary Wollstonecraft, but was quickly and summarily rejected. She had, however, the tact to retain him as a friend, and for years kept up a constant and intimate correspondence with him. For Fanny Blood Mary had a very strong and enduring affection, the devotion of which she lived to prove. Fanny was a promised wife; but her lover, whose name was Skeys, treated her in most unchivalrous—nay, almost unkind, fashion. She persisted, nevertheless, in cleaving to him in spite of all his slights, and at length became his bride. The poor girl's married happiness was, however, very short-lived: she went with her husband to Lisbon, where he had some business call, and there her health, undermined doubtless by the ceaseless ferment of anxiety in which she had been kept before marriage by the man she loved, gave way. Mary Wollstonecraft, in the generous devotion of her friendship, gave up her school and hastened out to Lisbon to nurse her; but all her love and care were of no avail: Fanny died soon after she had given birth to a daughter. Mary Wollstonecraft promised the young mother in her last moments never to forsake this child; and throughout her life, in all its trials and vicissitudes, kept nobly her word.

Mary Wollstonecraft found school-keeping such uncongenial, unprofitable work, and that more especially after her absence abroad, that she at length resolved to relinquish it, and to take a situation of governess in a private family. After a little time she managed to obtain such a post as she wanted, and went to Ireland to be governess to the children of Lord and Lady Kingsborough. The salary was large, and Mary, who wanted money for both herself and her family, took the situation chiefly for its sake.

Very soon, however, Mary Wollstonecraft found that her position, though shielded from the smaller worries and cares of her life as a needy schoolmistress, was by no means an enviable one. Lady Kingsborough, and all the noble ladies who were her visitors, were utterly unsympathetic to her; they dressed charmingly and looked bewitching, and flirted and talked fashionable scandal, and ate and drank a good deal, and sent flying hither and thither a certain light artillery of small witticisms, and played with my lady's numerous lap-dogs, who were rather better cared for than my lady's children; but none of these things were at all according to Mary's taste. They did not treat her unkindly, but she felt that she did not belong to either them or their world. She took some interest, it is true, in her pupils, and gained in some degree their affection, and no doubt opened their minds; but on the whole her residence in Ireland was a period of greyness and depression for her.

At length she grew so weary of and disgusted with her life in the Kingsborough family, that she gave up her situation, and returned to

London. There, through the instrumentality of some helpful friends, who knew and appreciated her intellectual power, she obtained an engagement with a leading bookseller of the day to do various kinds of literary work for him. Mary Wollstonecraft had now reached her right department in the world's workshop, and she was happier and freer and brighter than she had ever been before. She glided into society with men of letters such as was very congenial to her, she had just the sort of work she liked, she was entire mistress of her time and herself, she earned sufficient to live comfortably, and to give substantial aid to her relations. She was looked at a little askance by her own sex it is true, for it was an unheard of thing in those days that a respectable woman should take up literature as a profession; but Mary Wollstonecraft cared little for this; she was never particularly fond of female society in general. If truth must be told, she had rather a pride in affecting all the unpleasant peculiarities which in those days were popularly supposed to characterise literary women, such as inky fingers, soiled, torn dresses, dishevelled locks, and what we should now call a slangy tone of conversation; and thus discreet young wives and sober matrons with grown up daughters were very effectually kept aloof from her.

Mary Wollstonecraft soon began to do higher and more original literary work than that of a mere publisher's hack. Her novel, "The Wrongs of Women," made its appearance, and was well received by the public, as were her other books which followed it. The title of her novel, "The Wrongs of Women," sounds a key-note that rings through Mary Wollstonecraft's whole story; she always regarded her sex as misused and oppressed, and was always eager to champion its cause. She never understood how true men and true women should work together in beautiful harmony, each taking their appointed God-given part in the world's music; no doubt these opinions had been produced and fostered in her originally by the wrongs she had seen suffered by her mother, by her sister Eliza, and by Fanny Blood.

The literary work, however, by which Mary Wollstonecraft's name was made most widely famous was her paper contest with Burke regarding the French Revolution. Burke thundered against it, she raised her voice in its favour. Pamphlet after pamphlet followed each other in swift succession on both sides, and when the conflict was over, Mary Wollstonecraft was considered to have done more than hold her own against the intellectual giant.

So intense was Mary Wollstonecraft's interest in and sympathy with the French Revolution, that she went to Paris in order to study its features and development more closely. A nearer inspection showed her that much was dark which had looked bright at a distance when lit by the glamour of her enthusiasm, and she shuddered with disgust and horror in the midst of the Reign of Terror.

One incident of this period of Mary Wollstonecraft's life stands out with graphic distinctness before us. Mary is hurrying back to her lodgings through the streets of Paris in the fast-gathering twilight. Suddenly she becomes aware that she has got entangled in a crowd. There are fierce faces with glaring, pitiless eyes to the right of her, to the left, in front, behind. She looks around, she looks up uneasily, a shiver thrills through her frame; there, close to her, rises the hideous form of the guillotine. An execution is just over, and the ghastly tokens of it are still to be seen on the scaffold.

Most women in such a position would have fled in an agony of terror from the spot; but such was not the course pursued by the lion-hearted Englishwoman. She stands still, and faces the crowd with fiery indignation blazing in her eyes, and her voice rings out like a trumpet on the battle-field as she reproaches these so-called friends of liberty with the wrong done to our common humanity by these barbarous deeds done in freedom's name. It seems to us that she must fall a victim at once to her rash audacity; the guillotine is at hand. What is to hinder the sovereign people from taking immediate vengeance? Instead of that, however, they stand spell-bound by the stern majesty of her form, by her passionate eloquence, by the scathing lightning that flashed from her glance; not a sound is heard, not a hand or foot is stirred; and when she has ended, the throng divides, and she passes silently like an angry divinity through the midst of them and goes her way.

While she was in Paris, Mary Wollstonecraft became intimate with an American called Captain Imlay. He was a man whose best quality was animal courage; in other respects he was a very ordinary mortal indeed; but Mary Wollstonecraft's imagination created him a god, and she fell down and worshipped him. He returned her devoted affection with a certain amount of sensuous passion, and the two became lovers. Imlay preached to Mary the doctrine of free love; she held back a little from it at first, but there was no priest in Paris in those days to perform a holy rite. She was very lonely and unprotected in the midst of that city of blood and terror; marriage in the cases of her mother, of her sister, of her dearest friend had proved a bitter failure, Imlay's power over her was supreme, and she yielded, and the pair lived together unwedded.

Mary loved with all the faithful devotion of a wedded wife, but Imlay's affection was of a very different stamp. For a little while it burned hotly enough, then it cooled, though Mary tried to persuade herself it did not. The birth of her child did not draw him back to her; on the contrary, he sent her to the sea-coast under the pretext that sea air would be good for her, but in reality to free himself from her society. The result was only what might be expected after the evident change of sentiments on the gentleman's side. Mary Wollstonecraft woke one day to the full certainty that Imlay no longer loved her. There was sharp agony for her in this knowledge, but she

was too full of womanly pride to show her suffering. She and Imlay separated, and their lives never crossed each other again.

During the early days of her connection with Imlay, Mary Wollstonecraft took a journey to Sweden and the North of Europe. In those days such a journey was regarded as no small event, and the fact that she had undertaken it added to her title of "strong-minded woman." She made a bright, energetic traveller, and her experiences of foreign lands enriched and widened her intelligence.

After her separation from Imlay, we find Mary Wollstonecraft again settled down to literary work in London with her little daughter at her side. Her old friends soon gathered round her, and she lived much the same as she had done before she went to Paris. The communication between London and Paris was then so slow and scanty, that no one exactly knew what her connection with Imlay had been; most people believed that she had been really his wife, and that he had deserted her. Moreover, as has been said, the character of a literary woman was regarded as a very doubtful commodity at that period in England, and the class of persons who would associate with her at all troubled themselves very little about Mary Wollstonecraft's life in the French capital.

The wound made by Imlay's desertion was deep but not incurable. Mary Wollstonecraft's heart was healed by time and work, and then it was that the flower of love bloomed within her for a second time, and bloomed for a very different man from Imlay; that man was William Godwin. On their first meeting, Godwin and Mary, strange to say, mutually expressed a dislike for each other; but their sentiments quickly altered when they were brought into closer contact, and they found that there was an electric wire of powerful sympathy that drew them irresistibly together. Time passed, the attachment grew and deepened, and they felt they could not live apart.

Her old distrust of the marriage state again sprang up within Mary Wollstonecraft, and at first she lived with Godwin as she had done with Imlay, unwedded. When, however, she found that she was again about to become a mother, the thought of her child's future name and fame in England prevailed as nothing else could do, and she and Godwin were legally married.

All the purer and sweeter blossoms of her womanhood now began to bud in Mary Godwin, but they were never to come to perfection; she died after giving birth to a daughter, whom we know and speak of now as Mary Shelley, the poet's wife.

Let Englishwomen of to-day turn from Mary Wollstonecraft's story with a sigh, with a touch of pride, with strong thankfulness that the position of the literary woman of our own time is so far different from what it was when Mary fought her way to fame.

ALICE KING.

THE RESULTS OF A WEEK.

ONE summer's day, the Beddgelert coach was speeding through the beautiful Gwynaut valley on its way to the far-famed inn at Pen-y-gwryd. It bore a heavy load of passengers outside, and of luggage inside, and the horses were old and lean as Rosinante; nevertheless, the progress of the coach was merry and triumphant. As each glorious mountain sprang into view ahead it was greeted by the sound of the horn, and both horn and mountains seemed to inspirit the horses. They dashed up the last steep pull to the inn at a gallop, and stopped at the door panting, but proud.

On the threshold stood Mr. and Mrs. Evans, all smiles, like a father and mother waiting to receive their children. Two young, pretty-looking girls alighted and went up to Mrs. Evans. One was tall and fair, with a dignified carriage and an irreproachable costume. The other one was small and dark, with a very vivacious, charming face, and a costume more picturesque than neat. "I am Miss Tompkins," said the tall, fair girl, addressing the beaming landlady, "and this is my cousin, Miss Goring. We wrote to you from Beddgelert for rooms. Have you reserved any for us?"

Mrs. Evans had reserved two bedrooms, and led the girls upstairs to them, wondering rather that two such young girls should be careering over the country without any apparent protector. As they ascended the narrow, old-fashioned stairs, two young men who were about to descend paused on the landing above to let them pass. They looked at the new arrivals with much interest, and slightly raised their caps. In different styles, both were striking-looking men, and Miss Goring at once determined to find out who they were.

"Is the hotel full?" she inquired.

"As full as it can hold, and has been all the season," replied Mrs. Evans.

"Who were those gentlemen who passed us? I think I must have seen one of them before," she asked next, a little mendaciously.

"One is a Mr. James Hogg, from London. The other is Sir Launcelot Llewelyn, a Welsh gentleman with a very large property; and a bit of a bard too, so they say."

"A bard!" exclaimed both girls. "How delightful!"

"The one thing we have been longing for ever since we have been in Wales," went on Miss Goring, clasping her hands ecstatically, "and what a lovely name—Sir Launcelot Llewelyn! Which of them is it? The dark one I expect, is it not?"

"Yes, the dark one," replied Mrs. Evans, absently, at the same time throwing open the door of a rather dark room, which led into a brighter one beyond. The window of the inner room commanded a

grand view of Snowdon, and the girls rushed up to it at once rapturously, quite forgetting Mrs. Evans's existence.

"This is sublime!" exclaimed Miss Tompkins. "See how wild it is all around! We are surrounded by heights and precipices and lakes! And what a dear, old-fashioned hotel. Juliet, this is the end of the world; I should like to live here for ever!"

"So should I, Betty," replied her cousin; "and only to think that at last, after weeks of vain longing, we should have met a bard! By hook or by crook, Betty, we must make this bard's acquaintance. How soon is dinner, Mrs. Evans?" she called out after the retreating landlady.

"The table d'hôte bell will ring in half an hour," replied Mrs. Evans, smiling back at the excited young faces.

"Only half an hour!" exclaimed Juliet. "Betty, we must hurry over our toilettes if we are to be ready in time."

"Let us dine as we are," said Betty, who was inclined to be lazy.

"Never," said Juliet energetically. "We must inspire the Bard. We must have sonnets written about us, and elegies, and odes and all kinds of things, and we should never inspire him in our dusty travelling dresses."

Betty sighed, but Juliet was the ruling spirit, so she gave in and proceeded to make herself beautiful for the Bard. After this, utmost confusion prevailed; bags were thrown open and their contents strewn pell-mell over the floor, the one object being to find and put on fresh things in the shortest possible time. In this they were successful, and they were ready to go downstairs when the bell rang.

"Do I look as if I should inspire?" asked Juliet anxiously as they left the room.

Betty looked at her critically. "Yes, I think you do," she replied. "You could not be written about as a Madonna, or a Goddess, but as a Nymph or an Elf you would do capitally."

Juliet certainly looked exceedingly pretty. She had put on a soft silk dress of a deep coral shade, which was so simply made that it had the effect of hanging in straight folds from her shoulders, and of being only girdled in at the waist. She had lovely dark hair which curled naturally, and in order to look poetical she had allowed it to flow down her shoulders, simply tying it back a little with a coral-coloured ribbon. This style suited her exactly, and made her look inexpressibly youthful and girlish.

"Well, I will be content with that," she said in answer to Betty, "and perhaps you will inspire as a Madonna."

Betty had put on a dress of virgin-blue, and if being tall and fair and placid-looking entitled one to be called Madonna-like, then she was entitled to be called so, though she might not have inspired Raphael. When they reached the dining-room, they paused for a moment and looked about them for places. Every seat was already

taken, save four in a row at the further end of the room. Juliet's quick mind instantly seized the advantages of the situation.

"The Bard and his friend have not come in yet," she whispered, "so if you and I take the two inside seats, the Bard will be obliged to sit by one of us, and his friend by the other. Come, let us do it quickly, Betty."

"We shall be separating the friends," remonstrated Betty, but Juliet paid no heed. She calmly took an inside chair, and pulled Betty's dress until she was obliged to sit down on the second. Then there remained a vacant chair on either side of the pair for the Bard and his friend.

Soup passed over, but they did not appear; fish—Ah! there they came, no longer attired in careless knickerbocker suits, but carefully got up in faultlessly-cut black coats. Juliet's rich colour deepened in her cheeks, and a sudden fit of shyness seized her. She kept her eyes down and a thrill passed over her. Which, oh which of them would the Bard choose to sit by? Apparently the Nymph inspired more than the Madonna, for when Juliet at last looked up, she found the dark man, the Bard, was seating himself by her with a little bow.

She felt overpowered at the honour thus done her; so honoured that she could not even talk to Betty. As for addressing the Bard himself, she felt quite incapable of such presumption.

Dinner went on, but to her great discomfiture the Bard did not address her, and proceeded with his dinner in silence. It was very disappointing. She felt that a bard who did not think her worth talking to, would not be likely to write odes and elegies about her, and began to feel uncomfortable at having separated him from his friend, who was also eating in silence.

At last, after what seemed an endless interval, she ventured, seeing he was very engaged with his dinner, to take a good look at him. It was a striking face, clean-shaven, and with strongly-marked features; Juliet was especially taken with the way in which his dark hair waved off his forehead: she thought there was something Byronic about it, and that it gave him quite a noble look. His eyes were fixed upon his mutton, but presently in some occult manner he seemed to become aware he was being stared at, for he turned and darted a swift glance at his pretty little neighbour with a half-amused smile upon his face. It was evident he was going to speak, and Juliet awaited his first poetical utterance with a nervous thrill of excitement.

"May I trouble you for the pepper?" he said quietly.

Juliet passed him the pepper-box with a keen pang of disappointment. She wished to inspire an epic poem, and behold! after sixteen minutes' propinquity he only thought her worthy of passing the pepper! A minute later Betty wanted the pepper, and Juliet had to ask for it back again. It was all horribly prosaic. A fierce

antipathy to pepper awoke in the girl's breast, and she longed to dash the fiery condiment to the ground. She began to look quite dejected. The Bard stole another look at her. The drooping head and downcast eyes were very attractive, and he seemed unable to turn his eyes away again.

"Did you come far to-day?" he asked, in a gentle, melodious voice.

Juliet looked up with a little start. There was a ring of sentiment in his voice which had been absent when he asked for the pepper. She answered him brightly, and soon they were engaged in an animated conversation. Juliet tried to turn the conversation on to poetry, so that she might find out something about his works, but he seemed to evade the subject, and once or twice looked quite astonished.

"Do you find the mountains give you much inspiration?" she asked, as two large family-looking plum tarts were placed upon the table.

"To tell you the truth, I do not think they do," was the unexpected reply, "but I find they give me an appetite;" and, as he spoke, he looked at the plum tarts with a bright and appreciative eye. This also was disappointing, but Juliet remembered to have heard that genius was retiring and given to hide its light under a bushel; so, taking fresh heart, she proceeded in her efforts to "pump" the poet.

"Ah! I see," she said, "you like the peaceful and pastoral better than the grand and terrible, so the valleys inspire you most. You are more a Wordsworth than a Shelley."

Her neighbour turned eyes positively dancing with amusement upon her. "I am afraid I am neither a Wordsworth nor a Shelley," he replied. "Are you fond of the poets?"

"Very," replied Juliet, enthusiastically. "I can read poetry all day long—and I think a poet's life is the noblest life possible. He inspires the world."

"Yes," replied her neighbour, speaking more gravely; "a poet's life may be very noble, and poetry, if properly directed, may have very great uses, and inspire the world to many great and noble deeds. Still, I place the man who inspires below the man who works. The man who does noble things is better than the man who sings of them."

"Men have to be taught what is noble before they practise it," said Juliet, who loved an argument; adding, with the dogmatism of eighteen: "The poet is the best, your life is the highest."

"My life is the highest!" repeated her neighbour after her, wonderingly. Then a light seemed to flash upon him. "Do you take me for a poet?" he asked, the amusement dancing back into his eyes.

"I know you are one," replied Juliet smilingly. "Mrs. Evans told me so. Oh! I *should* so like to read your poems! Have you any with you?"

The Poet was silent for a moment, and seemed to be struggling with some internal emotion. At length he spoke.

"To-morrow," he said, "I will show you all I ever composed in my life." Then he suddenly changed the conversation, and began talking of the neighbourhood, which he knew well, whilst Juliet, much flattered by the mark of confidence he had just shown her, hung upon his utterances and saw poetry in his every word. Meanwhile, Betty and her neighbour had also embarked upon an interesting conversation. Strange to say, they too talked of poetry, but the subject this time was started by the gentleman. He was a fair man with dreamy, heavy-lidded blue eyes, a thin, delicate face, and a curly aureole of fair hair. If Betty had not known him to be Mr. James Hogg, of London, she would have thought him both aristocratic and poetic-looking.

"There is no life like the poet's life," he said, enthusiastically, throwing himself back in his chair, and leaving his mutton untasted before him. "The poet can shake the power of kings, and the hearts of men are as playthings in his hands. He can scale the heavens, and fathom the lowest depths of hell."

Betty did not say so, but she thought this last experience must be very unpleasant. "Do you too write poetry?" she asked, with a dim idea in her mind that somewhere or other she had seen poems by a Mr. Hogg.

"I do," replied her companion; "I am now bringing out a little volume which is to be entitled 'Journeying through the Spheres,' and which describes the surprising experiences of a soul on being released from the body. A grand and comprehensive subject; do not you think so?"

"Very," replied Betty, with a slight smile she could not repress. "It is so nice when people get off the beaten track." Then, fearing she had been sarcastic, she added kindly, "I hope your volume will be a success."

"If it is not," replied Mr. Hogg, refusing plum tart rather gloomily, "I can only console myself by that line from Cowper: 'If the world like it not, so much the worse for them.'"

Again Betty felt inclined to laugh, but she restrained herself; for something in the young man's face touched her. He looked so delicate, so very much as if he needed sympathy and care. She longed to get him something very dainty to eat, and to put a warm shawl over his thin shoulders.

After dinner the young men disappeared, but they left a very favourable impression behind them. "I think Sir Launcelot is charming," said Juliet, when they were in their bedroom; "it is an honour to know him, and I mean to cultivate his acquaintance. Did you like Mr. Hogg, Betty?"

"Yes," said Betty, thoughtfully; "I think I may say I did. I feel a kind of motherly interest in him."

"But such a dreadful name," said Juliet. "I really could not be agreeable to a man called Hogg."

"What's in a name?" said Betty, unconsciously becoming poetical herself; and then they both fell asleep.

The next morning broke clear and beautiful, and the girls went down determined to "do something." Their two acquaintances strolled in whilst they were breakfasting, and received such a friendly greeting that they waxed bold and proposed an expedition together to Llanberis. Betty as the elder, and presumably therefore the chaperon, hesitated a little; but Juliet, who did not trouble her head about "les convenances," overruled her.

"I don't quite think papa would like it, they are such strangers to us," remarked Betty, as she reluctantly put on her hat.

"Oh, it's all right," said Juliet, carelessly. "Sir Launcelot is a gentleman; of that there can be no doubt; and Mr. Hogg seems thoroughly respectable."

"Respectable!" exclaimed Betty, more indignantly than the occasion warranted; "of the two, I should say he was the more aristocratic."

Juliet smiled a little as she led the way downstairs. It was a delightful walk to Llanberis, a distance of about six miles through the beautiful pass, giant precipices towering over them on every side.

Juliet walked ahead with the Bard, and they both seemed quite engrossed in each other. They no longer talked poetry; Juliet was content to await the proud moment when she was to be honoured with his confidence. Betty and Mr. Hogg walking behind also seemed extremely happy. The girls felt a little tired when they had come to an end of their walk, and inspected the lakes and waterfall, so they all repaired to the Victoria Inn to get some luncheon and rest. They were ushered into a spacious but empty coffee-room, and the young men ordered luncheon. A slight embarrassment crept over the party, as they awaited their meal in the big, empty room, and even Juliet began to feel they were doing an unconventional thing in thus spending the day with two young men of whom they knew so little.

"Are you making a tour in North Wales?" asked Sir Launcelot, breaking an awkward silence. It was the first personal question he had asked.

"Yes," replied Betty, eagerly, glad to explain the position, "but we have not been alone before, my cousin and I. Papa had to leave us for a week, so he sent us here from Beddgelert, having heard that Mrs. Evans was a kind, friendly woman."

"We must try and make the week pleasant to you, so that you may miss your father as little as possible," replied the Bard with a kind smile, and his little speech made the whole party feel more at ease. Presently he ventured to ask another question.

"Do you two live together?" he asked gently.

Juliet was seated in a chair, and Betty was leaning over the back of it when the question was asked.

"Yes," answered Juliet, "we live together. Betty and uncle are my all, and their home is my home. Everyone else belonging to me is dead."

She leaned her head back against Betty's shoulder as she spoke, and a soft mist came into her dark eyes. The young face looked inexpressibly touching and beautiful with the slight shadow of sorrow over it, and the Bard's eyes took a very tender look as he gazed down upon it.

"And Juliet is everything to us," said Betty quickly; "our home would lose its chief sunshine if we lost her." She passed her arm affectionately round Juliet's neck as she spoke, looking very fair and sweet, and Mr. Hogg looked at her with undisguised admiration.

Luncheon passed over pleasantly, and then they ordered coffee, which they sat a long time over, talking idly. Suddenly the Bard turned to Juliet and said: "Miss Goring, I promised last night to show you all I had ever composed in the way of poetry. I think this is a very fitting moment, and I propose to read to you now my first and last effort."

He drew a little slip of paper from his pocket as he spoke, and looked merrily across the table at Juliet sitting opposite.

Juliet felt disappointed. There was a publicity about this proceeding which took away the pleasant feeling that she had been thought worthy of a bard's confidence. And what a small strip of paper it was! It could not be a Tragedy, or an Idyll, or an Epic poem! It might be a Sonnet, but it must be a most wonderful Sonnet, since alone it had made the Bard's reputation. "I wrote it at the early age of seven," said the Bard, and then in a clear, melodious voice he read the following:—

One day as I was walking with my egshullent Mother
  In the pleasant fields of Sutton,
I saw disporting one of those woolly creachures
  Which when we eat it we call mutton.
"Fair maiden," I said to my egshullent Mother.
  "I seek for informashon
Is it right these woolly creachures should be killed
  To give food to the British Nashon?"
My egshullent Mother sat down,
  And a tear convulsed her feachures.
She replied, "We must not mind being eaten,
  If by so doing we can beneffit our fellow creachures,"
I often think of my egshullent Mother
  As I walk in the pleasant fields of Sutton,
And I long to beneffit my fellow-creachures.
  But alas! I am not mutton!
It is very sad that crewel fate
  Should thus my aspirashons clog,
But I will try to be very good bacon
  Since I was born ——— a Hogg!

Here the Bard ceased reading, and looked across at Juliet, who sat looking quite bewildered, a deep flush spreading over her face. "Then you are not a poet?" she said at last in a tone of the most naïve chagrin.

The author of the verses laughed. "No," he said, "that is an honour I have no claim to, as I have now successfully proved to you. My friend writes poetry"—here he looked at Betty's cavalier—"and very successful poetry; but I am content with a humbler walk of life."

"But I do not quite understand," said poor Juliet, a horrible suspicion creeping into her mind. "Are you not Sir Launcelot?"

"No, you have mistaken me for my friend. This is Sir Launcelot"—here he again indicated Betty's friend—"and I am Mr. James Hogg, as you may infer from my verses. Sir Launcelot is the descendant of a hundred kings; my only claim to distinction is that my father was a good and honest tradesman."

There was a good deal of dignity about the ex-Bard as he thus explained his position, but the dignity was lost upon Juliet. She was both mortified and disappointed, and the triumphant look in Betty's eye made her remember with shame the conversation they had had the evening before in their bedroom. After all, she had been making herself agreeable to a man called Hogg! A man whose father could only be described, at best, as an honest tradesman! That meant that he did not cheat behind the counter, did not sand the sugar, or mix dust with the pepper! What a claim to distinction! Her mortification and disappointment were so clearly expressed in her face that Betty tried to cover the awkwardnes of the moment by making a polite speech.

"Your verses are a little crude," she said smilingly, "but I like the sentiment of them. It is true and good."

"Quite so," said the real Sir Launcelot, chiming in eagerly. "I assure you, Miss Tompkins, they give you the key-note of my friend Hogg's character. He spends his life trying to benefit his fellow-creatures ——"

"Stop, Launcelot; I decline to be the subject of your eloquence," said Mr. Hogg laughingly. Juliet's manner had not discomposed him in the least, and his ease of manner compelled even her unwilling admiration.

Betty thought it wise to suggest a move after this, so they started homewards, but this time the order of their going was changed. Betty walked ahead with Mr. Hogg, and Juliet followed with Sir Launcelot. But though she had exchanged a sham poet for a real one, Juliet felt neither excitement nor pleasure. Sir Launcelot did his best to reinstate his friend on the pedestal from which he had evidently fallen, but in vain.

"Hogg is a splendid fellow," he said as they walked along. "He works like a galley-slave amongst the poor. I wish you could see his estate in Hampshire. It is quite a happy valley: model cottages,

hospitals, library, concert-room, recreation grounds, museum—all kinds of things to make the people happy."

"But how can he do all this if he is only a tradesman's son?" asked Juliet, who had been brought up in a rural district, and had been picturing a small village shop.

"Oh! his father amassed quite a fortune in his line of business," said the poet, lightly.

"What was his line of business?" asked Juliet, anxiously.

"He was a tailor," replied the baronet, a little unwillingly.

Juliet flushed crimson, and walked on in silence, disturbed to a degree which surprised herself. What if Mr. Hogg's father were a tailor, how could it possibly affect her? And yet it did affect her. She thought of the tailor at home: a mean-looking little man, in a white apron, with big scissors hanging from his waist, and a very fawning manner. So Mr. Hogg, senior, had looked, no doubt! Perhaps the son once wore the apron and scissors, and snipped at the waistcoats and trousers! And she had liked him so much, had thought him so grand, so noble, so poetic! It was like waking from a pleasant dream. Betty looked round at this juncture, and seeing the pair were silent and looked rather dull, she fell back, and the four walked together the rest of the way home. During the course of conversation, it transpired that Mr. Hogg was a clever and accomplished actor.

"He took in his own father once," said Sir Launcelot, laughingly; "rang at the door-bell in disguise, had himself announced as an American his father was expecting, and dined tête-à-tête with him without having his identity discovered. Don't you think that was rather clever, Miss Goring?"

"Perhaps so," said Juliet, unwillingly; "but I do not think anyone could take me in like that."

"Do you think not?" asked Mr. Hogg. He was walking by her side, very close to her, and looking down upon her from his superior height. Juliet looked up, and met the keen glance of his dark eyes. There was a calm assurance about him which annoyed her, she scarcely knew why, and she moved a little away from him as she answered, haughtily:

"I think I should know you, Mr. Hogg, under any circumstances; your father was very easily imposed upon, I should say."

Betty looked at her, wonderingly. She could not understand why Juliet should be so upset by a little mistake which was, after all, of very little consequence. They still had the honour of a bard's acquaintance. But then, Betty regarded the affair with more complacent eyes than Juliet, for, whilst she retained her poet, Juliet had lost hers.

The next day was Sunday, and the two girls came down rather late, in attire which was Sunday-like, and betokened an intention to go to church. The young men came and talked to them as on

the previous morning, but threw out no hint of a wish to accompany them. It is possible that if they had been warmly received they might have done so, but Juliet was so distant in manner that they did not feel encouraged to make any overtures.

"I suppose you are going to the little church at Capel Curig?" said Sir Launcelot.

"Yes," replied Betty. "It is only about four miles there, Mrs. Evans tells us, so it will be a nice walk."

"Let us come home over Moel Siabod, Betty," said Juliet. "It will be more interesting than the road."

"You must not attempt that mountain without a guide," exclaimed Mr. Hogg. "Remember, the country is utterly unknown to you; the sides of Moel Siabod are full of treacherous bogs, and the mists come over the mountains from Snowdon, and may envelop you whilst on the summit without a moment's warning."

"We shall be able to take care of ourselves, I have no doubt," said Juliet, looking exasperatingly pretty, though she tried to be disagreeable. Mr. Hogg accepted the snub, and said no more, but he looked very thoughtful, and rather mischievous as they left the room.

It was a lovely morning; the sunshine was dazzling, the sky cloudless, the air warm, yet breathing of the mountains. The girls walked quickly along the road, which descended gently, leaving first the rocky peaks of the wonderful Glydrs, and then the grand slopes of Moel Siabod behind them. Green stretches of grass were all around them, giant mountains reared their heads against the horizon, the lakes of Capel Curig lay shining and blue to their left.

The service in the little church was long; so, when it was over, the girls, feeling hungry, had some luncheon at the Royal Hotel before beginning their climb over Moel Siabod home. They left the hotel by a path indicated to them by the waiter, which led to a bridge over a stream, then following his directions they skirted a slate quarry, kept up along a ridge, and presently came to a grassy slope which ascended steeply to the rocky summit above.

It was a long, tiring climb, and they both began to feel very hot. It was now about two o'clock, and a haze was coming over the mountain tops around them, which, earlier in the day, had been so beautifully clear. At length they reached the rocky crest of the mountain. Some very hard, rough climbing followed, and then they gained the cairn. A glorious view rewarded them: all the great peaks of the Snowdon range were around them, Snowdon itself towering over them all, and far away shone the sea.

"See, Pen-y-gwryd lies down there," said Betty; "it will not take us very long to descend."

"It is a good thing it does not lie in this direction," said Juliet, laughing and pointing to the deep precipice which sheered down on one side from the point on which they were standing.

Betty looked round her apprehensively.

"I should not like to lose myself here in the dark," she said. "Juliet, look what a haze is spreading over the mountains; Snowdon is quite hidden, and it seems to be coming this way."

Juliet looked up startled. "It is not haze, it is mist," she said. "Oh! Betty, do you remember what Mr. Hogg said?"

It was as he had warned them. Without a moment's notice the treacherous mountain mist was upon them, slight at first, but getting denser and denser with frightful rapidity. Really alarmed, the girls hurriedly began to descend, making in a straight line for their hotel, but soon they could not see a yard before them. The mist had increased to a cloud, and veiled everything from their eyes. They stood still, not knowing in what direction to go, and peered at each other's white and frightened faces.

"The bogs," said Juliet in a tragic and most suggestive tone.

Betty shuddered. "The precipice," she said still more tragically, and then they both shuddered.

"I dare not take another step," said Juliet; "let us sit down on this stone, and wait to see if the mist will clear."

They sat down on the cold wet stone, and waited in silent suspense. A long time passed thus. It was bitterly cold, the mist was almost like rain, it soaked through their thin summer clothes, and chilled them to the bone. They bore it as long as they could, but at last the cold grew intolerable; the cruel fog showed no sign of lifting, and in despair they rose, determined at all risks to move on. Better to risk falling down the precipice than to perish slowly of cold.

"We must feel our way with our sticks," said Juliet, with teeth chattering; "but oh! Betty, give me your hand, I am so terrified."

The poor little girl was even more frightened than her companion. She was naturally more timid and imaginative, and realised more vividly the danger of the situation. Very slowly the girls advanced, clinging to each other with one hand, whilst they prodded the ground at their feet with their sticks to make sure of solid footing at every step. They could not tell whether they were descending the mountain side or not. Sometimes the ground seemed to slope downwards, then a great rock would loom upon them out of the mist, and they had to turn aside, and found themselves rising again. They became exhausted, and all hope fled from them. To add to their terrors, it began to get dusk; the day was declining, and soon night would be upon them. They were lost, hopelessly lost!

Suddenly Juliet, who was sobbing as if her heart would break, floundered violently, lost her hold of Betty's hand, and sank up to her knees in a bog. The poor girl screamed frantically, waving her hands above her head in utmost terror.

"Save me," she screamed. "Oh! Betty, don't let me die like this; don't let me sink and be choked in this horrible bog."

Betty leaned forward and tried to reach her, but the soft ground

gave way beneath her feet, and she dared not advance an inch nearer. She, too, lost all self-control, and sent shriek after shriek into the silent fog around them.

"Will no one come?" cried Juliet. "Oh, Betty, I am sinking deeper."

Betty looked wildly around. Was there nowhere any help? Oh! joy! From out the mist came a voice, a man's voice, calling to them, "Where are you?" Help was at hand.

"Here, here," screamed Betty, striving with her eyes to pierce through the mist. Guided by her voice, in another moment their deliverer had reached them. He was a big, powerful man, dressed as a shepherd, with a curly head of auburn hair, and a short curly beard and moustache. He wore a big slouching hat, and was closely followed by a collie. He perceived the situation at a glance.

"Throw yourself forward towards me," he called out authoritatively to Juliet, pushing Betty aside and taking her place.

Juliet obeyed him blindly, and as she did so, the man leaned forward, poising himself on one powerful foot, and stretching out his long arms, caught hold of the sinking girl. One violent long pull, and Juliet felt herself being drawn out of the soft mud, and swung round on to solid ground. She was half-fainting and beside herself with terror. She clung to her deliverer with all the abandonment of a frightened child, clasping his hand in both hers, as though she feared he would leave her. Her hat had fallen off into the bog, and her hair hung in damp tendrils all around her small white face, which would have appealed to the hardest heart in its helpless childish terror.

"Oh, don't let me go again! don't let me go again!" she half-moaned, leaning her head back against the man's broad shoulder. "I shall tumble into that horrible bog again; it will draw me down and choke me!"

In spite of his rough looks, the man evidently had a tender heart, for he took off his coat, and, wrapping it gently round the terrified girl, he lifted her in his arms, where she lay utterly silent and exhausted, only conscious that within them she had at last found safety and protection.

"Now, Brownie, lead the way home," said the shepherd, addressing his dog; and telling Betty to follow closely in his steps, he moved forward, the dog slowly leading them with short barks of excitement. "To Pen-y-gwryd Hotel, please," said Betty; "we are staying there."

"I know," replied the shepherd; "Mrs. Evans sent me after you. She was rare anxious when you did not return at midday. I had to leave the sheep then and there, and I doubt not shall find many gone astray when I get back, but I am right glad I have saved you two poor wandering lambies."

The man's speech was homely, but his voice was full and melodious.

To Juliet, nestling in his arms, the voice of her deliverer sounded the sweetest voice she had ever heard.

It was quite dark when they reached the hotel. A crowd of people were anxiously looking out for them all along the road, and at the door they were received with rapture by Mr. and Mrs. Evans. The shepherd carried Juliet straight into the bar-parlour, placed her on the settle, and then, with a few low words to Mrs. Evans, departed. Then Mrs. Evans turned everyone out but one maid, and with her help took off the girls' muddy and dripping garments, wrapped them in blankets, placed them in easy-chairs close in front of a roaring fire, and then administered to each a strong glass of whisky toddy. It was very nasty, and they soon grew unpleasantly hot, and neither of the girls remembered in the least how they got to bed that night; but Mrs. Evans declared afterwards that the toddy was very weak, and that they were quite sober, and that it had saved their lives in any case; so they tried to believe her.

Betty had quite recovered from her unpleasant adventure by the next morning, but Juliet, who was very excitable, suffered for some days from the shock fright had given her system, and from a sore throat, the result of exposure. She looked so feverish and weak next day, that Betty engaged a private sitting-room, and brought her down to lie on the sofa there. It was rather trying to Juliet to lie in that dull little room all day, with the sunshine blazing out of doors, and everyone going off to enjoy themselves. Betty, too, found it trying, but she would not leave her cousin.

"I wonder our friends have not been to inquire after us," remarked Juliet, in a piqued tone, when their tête-à-tête luncheon was over.

"Well, Juliet, you were not very agreeable to them when we saw them last, so perhaps they are shy of coming. It is not from want of kindness, for I hear both Sir Launcelot and Mr. Hogg went out in search of us last night."

Juliet was silent for a little after this, but she did not look satisfied. Presently she said more cheerfully: "I wonder where that dear shepherd is. Betty, he saved me from a most horrible death; we can never be grateful enough to him; and he was so kind and tender, I felt it all through me. I think we ought to send for him and thank him. We ought to give him a really handsome present. Do send for him, then we can talk to him, and find out what kind of present he would like."

The shepherd was sent for through Mrs. Evans, and sent word he would come and see them at five o'clock. Much pleased, Juliet arranged they would have tea and make him take some with them.

"We must treat him as if he were a gentleman," she observed; "we cannot make too much of him after his noble conduct, and it will put him at his ease, perhaps, to have something to eat and drink."

Betty agreed this would be the least they could do.

At five o'clock punctually the shepherd arrived. Rather to the surprise of the two girls he was neither shy nor embarrassed, but took his tea, as Juliet afterwards observed, "quite like a gentleman." He made an uncommonly good tea, too, and Juliet took it into her head that perhaps he did not often get a good meal, and pressed cake upon him, until he was obliged to state plainly that he could not manage any more. Then they began to talk, and the shepherd acquitted himself in a way that surprised his entertainers. His choice of words was homely, and his accent somewhat countrified, but he seemed to have read an astonishing amount for a man in his position, and at last he fairly electrified them by quoting a long passage from Shakspeare.

A shepherd, clad in rough, dirty clothes, talking with the ease of a gentleman to ladies, and quoting Shakspeare, was indeed an anomaly! Juliet became quite excited, and looked at him with undisguised curiosity and admiration. She noticed that his hands, though large and sunburnt, were beautifully formed, and the nails as well kept as if he had never done a day's work in his life. Unable to restrain her curiosity, she said suddenly:

"Surely you have not always been a shepherd?"

"May I ask why you doubt it, miss?"

"Because," said Juliet rather confusedly, "you seem better born than that—I mean you look and speak as if you ought to occupy a better position. Are you content with your present one?"

"I am content to remain a working man, and to do what has been given me to do. I do not think it matters what a man's position is. It is what he is himself that matters."

"I quite agree with you," said Juliet eagerly, fearing she had wounded him. "If a man is brave, and gentle, and true, as I am sure you are, whatever his birth may have been, he is as much a gentleman as the descendant of a hundred kings."

"Even if he be the son of a tailor?" put in Betty, provokingly.

Juliet turned very red. "Of course," she said, "even if he be the son of a tailor."

"I am glad to hear you say so," said the shepherd gravely, and as he spoke Juliet caught a glance from his dark eyes which bewildered and disconcerted her, she scarcely knew why.

"I am glad to hear you say so," he repeated still more gravely, and then he rose with his hat in his hands as if to go.

"Oh, please stop one moment," said Juliet, blushing to the roots of her hair and feeling very shy. "You know we are deeply indebted to you, my cousin and I; you saved our lives, and we wish to give you a little present, a little remembrance of yesterday, if we only knew what would please you. Or," she added hesitatingly, "would you like some money?"

"I do not care for money, thank you," replied the shepherd,

quietly, "but there is something that would give me great pleasure, only I fear to offend by asking for it."

"You may ask anything you like," said Juliet, gently; "you will not offend us."

"May I come and talk to you again, and hear about London and the big world? It is a great pleasure to me to talk to ladies."

"Certainly," replied Juliet, looking very pleased; "come to tea again to-morrow."

The shepherd bowed and departed, looking very fine and stalwart as he left the room.

"Is he not charming?" asked Juliet rapturously a minute after.

But Betty had suddenly become pettish—a most unusual thing with her—and would not respond. She said shepherds were very well in their way, but that she was not sure it was correct to have them to tea, and she was sure papa would not like it, and *others* had come in search of them besides shepherds, but she supposed, now Juliet had got hold of this new idea of social equality, baronets were beneath her notice! Juliet listened at first in amazement, but presently a light seemed to dawn upon her and she said sweetly:

"Betty, dear, since I cannot go in to dinner, and you will not leave me, and since you think I have been rude, suppose we ask Sir Launcelot and his friend to come and have coffee with us after dinner?"

Betty brightened up instantly, and we presume that on this occasion the fact that it was for coffee, and not for tea, made the invitation correct, for no doubts as to whether papa would like it or not seemed to assail her. A polite note was despatched to the gentlemen, who sent back a reply almost immediately, accepting their kind invitation. At eight o'clock they arrived, and Betty received them with much animation. Juliet tried to be cordial, but she felt too physically weak to exert herself much, and Mr. Hogg's presence, and the keen and frequent glances of his dark eyes made her feel shy. She lay back on her cushions, rather silent, and listened to the gay chatter of the others.

"Our deliverer has been having tea with us," observed Betty presently.

"What is he like?" asked Mr. Hogg.

"Oh! decidedly above the average shepherd," replied Betty. "I should like his clothes to have been a bit cleaner, but he really behaved very nicely."

"I suppose he was very shy," observed Sir Launcelot.

"Not at all," said Betty; "he made an enormous tea, and asked leave to come again."

"Now, Betty, you are not to speak of my dear shepherd in that tone," said Juliet, forgetting her shyness. "He is one of nature's gentlemen, and I feel quite fond of him."

Then she burst into such a panegyric on the absent shepherd

that her three hearers all began to smile. Perceiving this, she cooled down and laughed herself, and they all talked happily together for a little bit. Then Sir Launcelot produced a birthday book of quotations from his own poems, and he and Betty became absorbed in it, leaving Juliet and Mr. Hogg to entertain each other, which they seemed to do extremely well. Every now and then a vision of a mean-looking old man in a white apron snipping at a pair of trousers with long scissors floated before Juliet's eyes and disturbed her a little, but she remembered the shepherd's words and tried to dismiss the vision as unworthy of her.

At ten o'clock Mr. Hogg rose to go. Sir Launcelot objected, he wanted to finish reading the birthday book with Betty, but Mr. Hogg was firm.

"Miss Goring looks very tired," he said, looking down with decided tenderness on the flushed face on the sofa-cushion. "Perhaps we may be permitted to come again to-morrow."

Permission was given, and on this understanding Sir Launcelot consented to go.

The next day Juliet's throat was still sore, so Betty again stayed at home with her. At five o'clock the shepherd came to tea, and Sir Launcelot unexpectedly called and was invited to tea also; scoring thereby, as he observed, over his friend Hogg, who would only get coffee.

He was introduced to the shepherd and the two talked a good deal together, the shepherd again astonishing the girls by his conversation and bearing. He completely fascinated Juliet, and the hour he stayed passed to her like five minutes. Mr. Hogg did not seem in the least jealous when he appeared at coffee, though Sir Launcelot had stolen a march upon him; and they had another very pleasant evening.

The next day, Wednesday, Juliet was still poorly, but she insisted on Betty's going for a walk. Betty went out alone, rather reluctantly, declaring she should return in twenty minutes. Three hours later she returned, accompanied by Sir Launcelot and hoping Juliet had not been dull. Juliet was looking much brighter and declared she had not been at all dull. The shepherd had been to inquire after her, and had brought her the most beautiful wild flowers, and had shown her a portrait of his mother, who was quite lovely. "Such a sweet, good, refined face," said Juliet; "I do not wonder now that he is an exceptional man, for he evidently had a most exceptional mother."

That afternoon Sir Launcelot and Mr. Hogg called and stayed to tea; they also called again in the evening and stayed to coffee. It is possible these manœuvres might have been repeated the following day had not a check been given them by a letter from Betty's papa, which arrived next morning, stating that his business had been finished sooner than he expected, and he hoped to be with his

darlings that evening. Juliet was better, and the girls were sitting out on a bench in a quiet corner of the road when they read the letter. They looked at each other blankly.

"He will take us on to Bettws-y-Coed to-morrow," said Betty, with a glimmer of tears in her blue eyes.

Juliet said nothing, but a little lump rose in her throat as she realised that soon Pen-y-gwryd—and its inmates—would be things of the past. At this moment Sir Launcelot came along the road accompanied by the shepherd, who carried a posy of wild flowers. They came up to speak to the girls.

"I hope you have not had bad news," said Sir Launcelot, looking first at their faces and then at the open letter in Betty's lap.

"No," replied Betty, huskily; "but papa comes home to-night and will take us on to Bettws-y-Coed to-morrow."

For a moment Sir Launcelot and the shepherd looked as blank as the girls, then they exchanged a curious and significant look with each other.

"Miss Tompkins," said Sir Launcelot, nervously, "since this is to be our last day together, will you come for a little walk with me? —I have—something—to say to you."

Without a word Betty put on the hat in her hand and joined him. The two walked slowly away down the valley in the sunshine, leaving Juliet on the bench, with the shepherd holding his posy of wild flowers by her side. The little girl looked after them wistfully, realising vaguely that some great happiness was coming to Betty. But it would take Betty from her, and Betty was all she had! She felt lonely, and looked up, half unconsciously, at the shepherd, with a longing for sympathy she could not repress. The shepherd's eyes met hers, and young as she was, Juliet could not mistake that burning gaze. She saw there all she wanted: comprehension, sympathy, tenderness, nay more, passionate love. Another moment and the shepherd was by her side, holding her hand in his, thrilling her through and through with eloquent words of love. She was amazed and felt as if she had passed into a dream. The man by her side had become transformed, he was no longer countrified, his accent and manner had changed. It was Mr. Hogg's voice, Mr. Hogg's manner.

"Oh! who are you? tell me!" she cried, bewildered and half frightened.

The shepherd checked himself suddenly, and, putting up his hand, brushed off hastily first an auburn wig and then the auburn whiskers and moustache; standing revealed as Mr. Hogg. Juliet gazed at him, first incredulously and then with rising anger. He had been masquerading then, taking her in, making fun of her all these days! It was a bitter thought and overpowered every other.

"How could you?" she said. "You have played an idle and cruel jest upon me;" and, hardly able to suppress her tears, she leaned back and covered her burning face with her hands.

"Juliet," said Mr. Hogg gravely, "you almost challenged me to this jest, but it is no idle one. I adopted my disguise, in the first instance, to save you from danger, fearing you would reject a guide in the shape of Mr. Hogg. I continued to personate the shepherd because it gave me double opportunities of seeing you, and, I hoped, of winning you. I love you most intensely and truly. I ask you to give yourself to me, to come and brighten my home, and share my work, and give me the love I need so sorely. Juliet, will you come to me?"

The voice was beautifully tender and pleading, but Juliet was smarting under a sense of humiliation and shut her heart against it. "I would rather you went away," she answered, coldly, without even looking up at him.

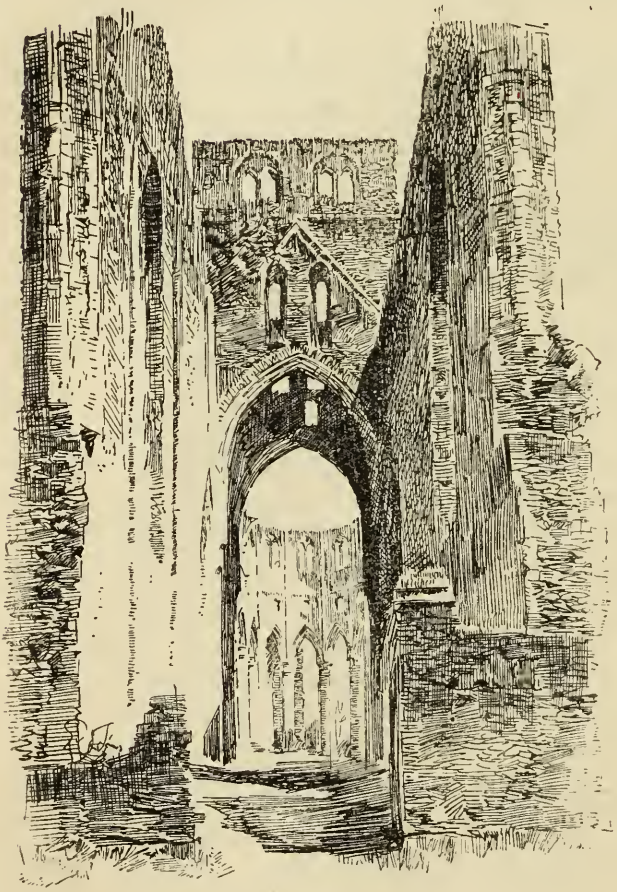
Her lover got up, and his voice, when he spoke, showed how deeply he was wounded. "I would have loved you dearly," he said, looking down at her; "I would have sheltered you from every sorrow, I would have cared for you and protected you to the end of my life; but you think nothing of my love, you throw it away, and so—I leave you. Farewell, Juliet."

Then he left her and walked down the road with the flowers still in his hand. The choked feeling came back into Juliet's throat as she watched him walking away from her. It came over her suddenly that she was sending away something very precious, something she longed for deeply in her heart. Strange to say, it was not Mr. Hogg at all who was in her mind as she watched the retreating figure, but the shepherd only. The shepherd who had saved her life, who had carried her so tenderly in his arms down the mountain side, who would have loved her and cared for her all his life! She could not let him go. She called after him wildly. He turned, and she ran after him sobbing. He held out his arms to her when he saw her face, and she ran into them, and clung to him almost as she had clung that day on the mountain side.

"Oh, Shepherd, dear Shepherd, do not leave me," she said, between her sobs; "stay with me and love me for ever."

FAIR NORMANDY.

By Charles W. Wood, F.R.G.S., Author of "Through Holland," "Letters from Majorca," etc. etc.



Hambye, Interior of Abbey.

I HAVE mentioned elsewhere that but for certain turnings and windings of the road, you might, from the roof of the exquisite castle of Creully, see the far-off spires of Bayeux. One fine day we extended our drive and there took flight; for the old town exacts the homage of a visit. It need not extend itself beyond a morning call, but this at least it demands.

The drive alone would reward one for the undertaking, and Bayeux comes in as a "pièce de résistance" at the end.

In truth it is somewhat disappointing. In its general aspect, the old town possesses very little in the way of antiquity. With one or two exceptions: charming little bits which form a fine composition and carry one back to the picturesque Middle Ages: Bayeux is much more a town of to-day than of the past. It seems to spend a very dreamy existence. It is watered by the Aure, a small river whose life is as placid as that of the inhabitants. A bridge crosses it on the outskirts of the town; houses and trees find their quiet reflection upon its surface, and the inevitable washerwomen upon the banks give it an element of life and movement that would otherwise be wanting.

The streets are almost deserted. "What's this dull town to me" might have been written of it, and certainly no Robin is to be

seen there on ordinary occasions. It is small, consisting of two principal streets, displaying the few sleepy shops of the town, and the specimens of mediæval architecture already alluded to.

Bayeux has had its history, and goes far back to the second century. In the fourth century it is mentioned by a Roman poet under the name of Bajocassis, and the first town was called Augustodurum by the Romans. Later on it became the capital of the Bessin. It was converted to Christianity in the fourth century by St. Spirus, who founded the Bishopric. It was taken by Edward III. in 1346, and by Henry V. in 1417, and in the thirteenth century it bravely resisted an invasion of the Saxons. It has been frequently burnt. In 1450 Charles VII. retook it from the English; but it went through troubled times, wars and bloodshed, until 1590, when it fell under the quieter rule of Henri IV. of France. Since then it has enjoyed an even, tranquil existence.

To-day its principal attractions are its cathedral and its tapestry. The former has been completely restored; the latter flourishes under glass cases in the museum. Both were gigantic works to undertake; and if the architect of Bayeux Cathedral was a man of genius, Queen Matilda must have been a woman of very rare patience.

On the site of the cathedral there formerly existed a Romanesque church. This, burnt down in the year 1046, and rebuilt in the days of William the Conqueror, was again destroyed in 1106 when Henry I. of England sacked and set fire to the whole town.

After that arose the present cathedral, but it has been subjected to many changes and additions. It is a fine Gothic edifice dating from the middle of the thirteenth century, though portions of it, belonging to the previous church consecrated by William the Conqueror, date from the twelfth. It has a very fine west front in pointed Gothic. The three porches are thirteenth century, florid in style, decorated with magnificent bas-reliefs and ornamental foliage. The steeples are twelfth century and, crowned by their beautiful spires, give the west front a very imposing appearance. The tone of the exterior is scarcely pleasing; neither red nor yellow; but seems fading from the one colour into the other. It is not effective, and is wanting in that look of antiquity which gives so great a charm to the buildings of the past. The spires form a landmark in the country, conspicuous in the plains and rivalling the hills.

The interior is long and imposing. The arches on the left of the nave are Norman, those on the right Gothic, forming a singular contrast. The heaviness of the piers is relieved by diapered patterns upon the walls. Above the arches is a low trefoiled arcade forming the balustrade of the triforium, though the church does not possess a true triforium, excepting in the choir, and the clerestory above is lighted by high and narrow windows. It is all thirteenth century work; this upper portion light and graceful as the lower is heavy and dignified. The arches and clustered pillars of the crossing and the

choir are very beautiful, and were built by Henry de Beaumont, who was Bishop in 1205. There is a great deal of rich and beautiful carving about the church. The stalls are also finely carved in the Renaissance style and date from the sixteenth century.

Not far from the cathedral, and at right angles with it, is the small museum containing the tapestry. It must have been a work of endless time, and is ascribed to Matilda, Queen of William the Conqueror.

It is done on white linen cloth, now browned with age, yet in perfect preservation. It is two hundred and thirty feet long and eighteen inches wide, and is kept stretched out to view under upright glass cases. The work is done in coloured worsteds, and the subjects are scenes from the life of William the Conqueror, illustrating his progress in taking England. These scenes are explained by Latin inscriptions, without which it would sometimes be difficult to interpret them. The figures, rudely formed, and generally in outline, are quaint and curious. The English are depicted with moustaches, the Normans without. The worsteds have wonderfully kept their colours. The borders consist of scenes taken from Æsop's Fables. Historically the tapestry is valuable and interesting. Towards the end we come to the Battle of Hastings, and the slain lying upon the field; and it is supposed that only the death of Matilda prevented the final scene from being worked—the Coronation of William.

These two subjects, the cathedral and the tapestry, make Bayeux not only worth visiting, but not to be passed over; but the town possesses little else. Two or three hours are sufficient to devote to it, and it may be taken in the day's journey from one place to another. We found the hotel a little primitive, but sufficiently comfortable, and famous for its delicious fresh lobsters; for Bayeux is only five miles from the sea.

Many places one leaves with regret, but when we said good-bye to Bayeux we left no regret behind us. In all but the cathedral and the tapestry, H. C. was disappointed. It was his first visit there, but I who had seen it before knew what to expect. What he had thought to find, I scarcely gathered: a mediæval old town, full of an antique atmosphere and chivalric remains; a dream of fair women who, of course, would bow down before him—they always do so; studies in attitude; graceful kneeling penitents in quiet corners of remote side chapels.

All were conspicuous by their absence. The streets were deserted. No fair women were abroad; and as for the cathedral—either the fair ladies of Bayeux are saints and need no shriving, or they are still in a state of impenitence. However that might be, H. C. was disappointed, and he threw up his cap and cried hurrah as we bowled away from Bayeux and left it to the quiet enjoyment of its wavering, whispering trees.

When we returned to Caen, it seemed quite noisy, lively and bustling after the deadness of Bayeux. Yet is Bayeux a chapter in

the volume which comprises the History of Normandy, the times of William the Conqueror and all the scenes and events with which he is for ever associated.

But the day came when we must leave Caen also, and even here I do not know that we left many regrets behind us. For if Caen possesses many charms, it has its drawbacks. Especially is the air close and relaxing, weighing you down with a feeling of depression. The hotels are not really comfortable, and you are not at your ease. You make the best of things, which is wisdom and half the battle; but it is not paradise, and if you persuade yourself that it is so, like the little Marchioness you must "make believe" to a great extent. And she, after all, was like a certain friend of the writer, who shall be nameless: she mixed up her orange-peel with water and declared it wine, but she knew all the time she was deceiving herself; and he, having joined the Temperance Society, squeezes his orange into a wine-glass and declares that it is better than champagne, but he, too, knows that he is deceiving himself; and when the champagne goes round and he declines it, a hungry, regretful, dissatisfied look comes into his eyes, and a secret contemptuous glance is thrown at the oranges, followed up by a quiet curling of the lip in scorn. We all try and "make believe" on many an occasion through life; we declare that this is so and that is not; but we never really cheat ourselves; we are only children of a larger growth, playing at Hide-and-Seek not only with each other but with our own hearts and minds.

We left Caen one fine day for Coutances. The journey was long because the train was slow, and we passed through much interesting scenery of the true Norman type—an equivalent to saying that it much resembled the English. But it grew monotonous at last, and we were not sorry, on reaching St. Lo, to find that we had more than an hour to wait. This would give us time to see something of the place and the church, which all looked highly picturesque and interesting as we approached it from the railway.

It is built on a hill, and the church towers rise nobly. It seemed a flourishing little town, with a certain amount of animation about it. The streets were steep, and we had a sharp climb to the church. The whole aspect of the place was picturesque, and though most of the houses were comparatively modern, a few of the really ancient were amongst the most interesting examples that we found in Normandy. The base of the hill is washed by the waters of the Vire, and the river goes winding away in the far-off plains, whilst many small streams add to the charm of the landscape. The Vire runs its course through lovely orchards and valleys, and the walks along its banks form one of the principal attractions of St. Lo.

The church crowns the hill, which overlooks the surrounding plains, and from which the view is magnificent. The building is an imposing Gothic edifice of the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries. Its west front possesses a good decorated arcade and central window,

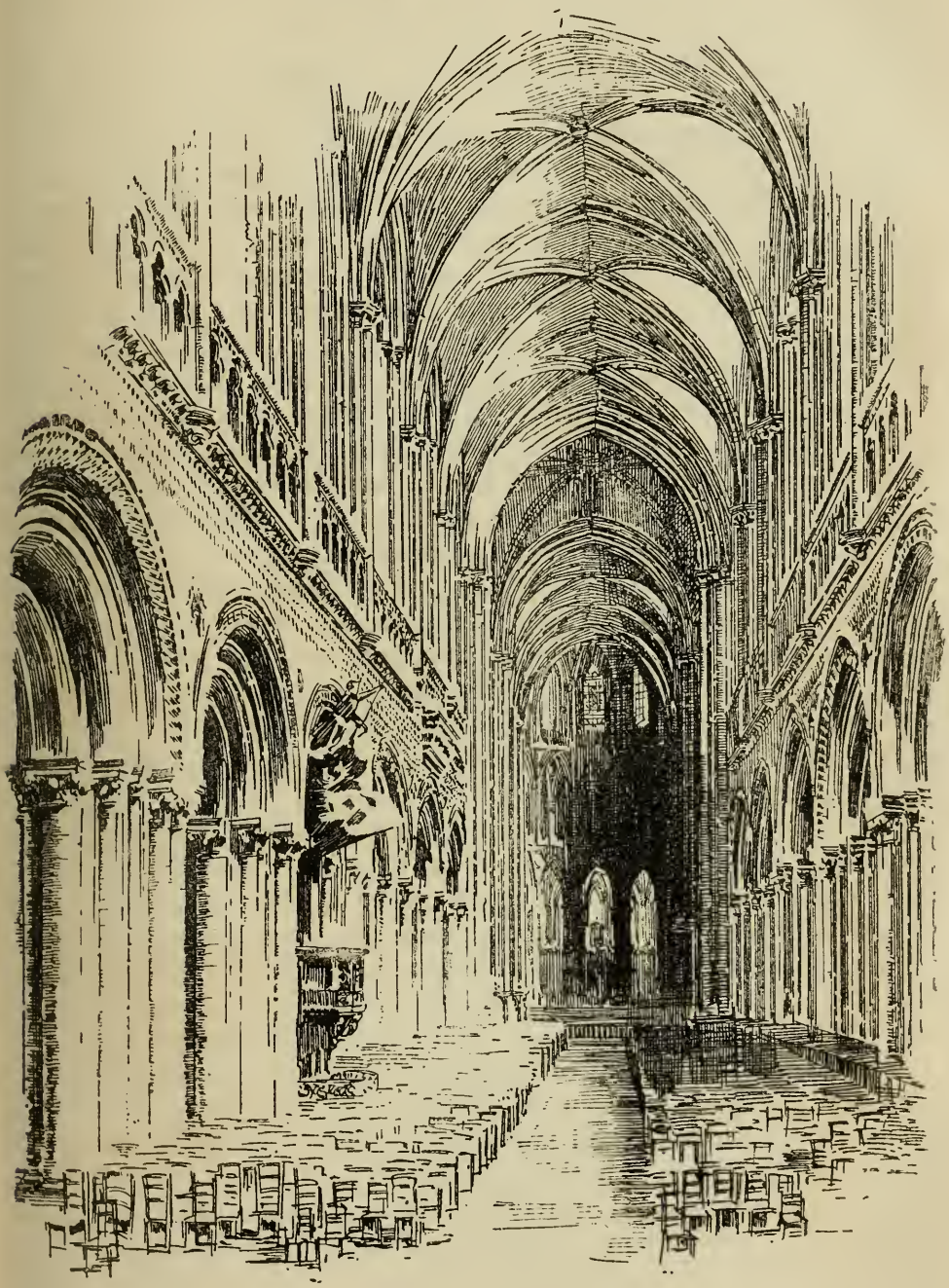
but its Flamboyant additions have not improved it. On the north side of the church is an exterior stone pulpit, very quaint, of fifteenth century work. Here in days gone by, when the church

COUTANCES.

was a cathedral, all the episcopal announcements, temporal and spiritual, were given out, and it remains as a curious and artistic relic of the past.

The town takes its name from Lo, or Laud, a saintly bishop of

Coutances, who lived in the sixth century. In the days of Charlemagne the town was strongly fortified; but in 889 the Normans burnt it to the ground and massacred a great part of the inhabitants.



INTERIOR OF BAYEUX CATHEDRAL.

It was frequently taken after that by the French and English, and it became the scene of many religious persecutions.

We had a sharp descent back to the station, where the train was getting up steam for Coutances, and in about an hour's time the

houses and churches of the old town, also on a hill, came into view.

Coutances is indeed "a city set on a hill," and crowning it is its magnificent cathedral, which towers above the houses, and seems reaching towards the clouds. The streets are narrow, ill-paved, and often steep. The high road is built on a terrace cut in the hill-side, and the views from this of the surrounding country are extensive and often romantic, stretching away into valleys and orchards and flowing streams, bounded by hills clothed with richest verdure.

In the town itself, the only flat part is the small market place in front of the cathedral, where a few old women sit out their daily existence selling vegetables. We asked the price of a large pumpkin, which we should have had some trouble to carry away with both hands, and for this she modestly asked a halfpenny. She was a picturesque old woman, from an antiquarian point of view: age and wrinkles, grey hairs and bent back; and when we turned away and did not take her pumpkin, she looked up with pathetic and appealing eyes, which seemed to protest against bargaining for a lower price. Would we have three for two sous? The look went straight to one's heart, and though we did not take the pumpkin we gave her the sous; and we saw that for that day at least she felt herself rich. But she looked puzzled also, and she evidently thought us eccentric: Englishmen did not often visit Coutances, and few people paid for pumpkins which they did not take away. Her sight was growing dim, no doubt, and she failed to discern H. C.'s amiable and benevolent expression, which would have been a key to the whole small matter—not small to her.

The streets of Coutances are not very interesting. There are few traces of antiquity about them. They are narrow, and the houses are too close to each other. They have no style or grandeur. It is essentially a town of small trade; not one frequented by pleasure-seekers. Yet how much it has to offer in return for a visit. What a splendid cathedral; how grand; how severe! and what charming environs and wonderful châteaux and ancient and glorious ruins!

Its cathedral is without doubt one of the finest Gothic edifices in Normandy. It dates from the thirteenth century, and its massive grandeur possesses all the beauty of antiquity, with all its wonderful tone and colouring. In this, as in many other ways, it is a direct contrast to the cathedral of Bayeux. The charm of tone is necessary to perfecting even the most finished architecture. The whole building is wonderful in design and execution, and the justness of its proportions. Unlike most of the cathedrals of Normandy, the spires crowning the west towers exactly resemble each other. The central tower is without a spire, but it is very fine: it opens to the lantern inside, beneath which one is lost in admiration when gazing upwards at its beauty and elegance. The exterior of the east end is magnificent, but is so close to the gardens of the bishopric that it is almost

impossible to obtain a proper view of it. Unfortunately, too, we found it in the hands of the workmen, like most of the churches and cathedrals that we visited this time. A general and unhappy spirit of restoration seems to have been poured out upon Normandy.

The interior is worthy of the exterior. It is of great extent, and its feeling of vastness is increased by the rare fact that the side chapels have open walls, so that the sight penetrates from one end of the building to the other. These open screens of mullioned tracery separating the chapels correspond in design with the tracery of the windows, and the whole effect is one of extreme beauty and refinement. The choir is isolated from the aisles by being raised four steps above them, with admirable effect; and the same peculiarity is found at Bayeux. The central aisle has a blind triforium, surmounted by a clerestory of great beauty, and the windows have some very beautiful glass of the fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth centuries.

One is never tired of gazing at this wonderful cathedral, with its peaks and pinnacles, its flying buttresses, its beautiful pointed windows, its perfect spires, and its bold and splendid tower. It rises majestically on the very summit of the hill, far above all surrounding buildings, looking down upon the hills and valleys, the smiling orchards, the running streams of Fair Normandy: a matchless vision of earth's glories. It overshadows the quiet streets of the old town: streets that are old rather than quaint, and about which there is a certain dilapidated air, as if the inhabitants did not too often paint the outsides of their houses. There is no attempt at artistic effect—at beautifying their windows by flowers and similar "quiet attentions:" the inhabitants may be thrifty, but they are not rich. For beauty and grandeur, and the influence that these have upon the mind, they must go to that majestic cathedral, which seems to look down upon them with protecting power and sanctifying influence. The old women in the market-place, selling their pumpkins, and for ever dwelling under the refuge of its walls, ought to be holy and righteous; but there is such a thing as a familiarity that breeds contempt, and they probably are insensible to the beauty that is ever before them.

Within the building your footsteps echo in the vast expanse; a few stray worshippers, kneeling before their favourite shrines, seem lost in space; at the far end, gliding round into the Lady Chapel, a black-robed penitent looks shadowy and ghostlike. You hear no footsteps, you see no movement; nothing but a gliding motion, until the choir takes it beyond view, and it seems to have passed away into the unseen world.

Leaving the cathedral and the little market-place, with its old women, behind you, you come to a steep hill, which discloses the church of St. Peter's on the left. It is a remarkable building of various styles; a mixture of Gothic or Tudor and Renaissance. The tone is exquisite; dark, sombre, and mysterious; it looks a thousand years old, but dates only from the beginning of the fifteenth century.

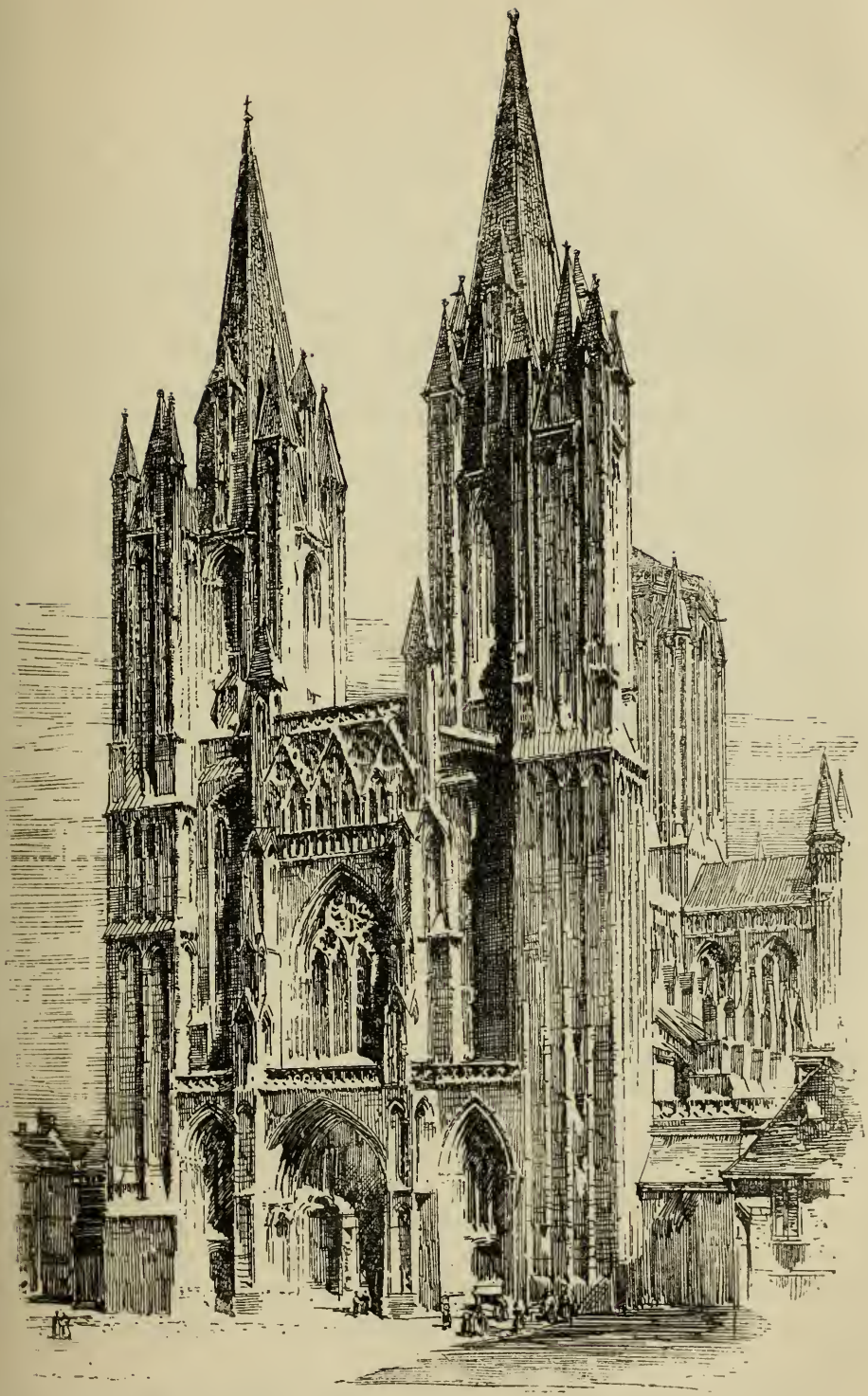
The west doorway is flanked by two enormous buttresses, holding niches for bells and surmounted by an effective sixteenth century tower. Between the buttresses is a large window, and above it a row of small arcades decorated with trellised vine leaves, marking the first stage of the tower. Above this rises a second stage of sixteenth century Gothic, and the whole is crowned by a dome with a Renaissance lantern. The interior of the church is not remarkable. It is its wonderful tone that arrests the eye and challenges the admiration.

There is one more church in Coutances worth visiting, that of St. Nicholas. But whilst St. Peter's is interesting for its exterior, which is plain and heavy, St. Nicholas is only remarkable for its interior. The nave is Renaissance, and the transept is surmounted by a fine eighteenth century dome. The five arches of the nave are supported by very fine semi-cylindrical pillars, destitute of ornamentation; but the capitals of the choir are delicately sculptured. The church is not large, but it has a certain air of severity about it, and, for its size, it is dignified and impressive.

These three churches form the whole attraction of Coutances from an architectural point of view. They are sufficient. The cathedral is more than a host in itself; it is worth a long journey to visit; and during your sojourn in the town you will return to it over and over again, gazing upon its beauties, learning them by heart, and allowing their influence to sink into the mind. You will stand amazed before the majesty and intense severity of its west front, the wonderful lines of the towers, crowned by those glorious spires. You will long to throw open the great west portal that the vision of the interior might be revealed to you. At night, crowded with worshippers, brilliantly lighted, the pealing organ swelling through arch and aisle, it would indeed be a vision of Eden rather than of earth.

You will pass to the far east end, and the amiable builder who superintends the work now going on will take you on to the roof of his house, whence you look down upon the length of the building, and note all the wonderful harmony of detail, all its richness; pile rising above pile, peak above peak, roof above roof; the east end falling away in graceful flying buttresses supporting the pointed windows, the Lady Chapel terminating all. Then above the roof and towards the west rises the magnificent centre tower, an expansion of the Norman lantern, plainly meant for a spire, but beautiful and refined without it; and beyond all, the west towers, full of elegance and beauty, crowned by their spires, conclude the magnificent structure, which seems to raise its head proudly towards the blue dome of heaven, challenging the regions of cloudland.

We made the acquaintance of another structure whilst in Coutances, but of a very different kind. A passing erection which rose up in a night, and in a night disappeared. We were startled one morning by a noise of brazen instruments vigorously blown and drums loudly



Coutances Cathedral.

beaten. It had quite a martial sound, and we wondered—not whether the Campbells were coming—but whether a revolution had broken out, or the Germans had re-invaded France, and Coutances was in a state of siege.

The sound drew nearer, and then a cavalcade passed up the street in a procession of one, a huge van drawn by four splendidly caparisoned horses, and the triumphal car all gilt and gingerbread. Ladies wonderfully attired blew brazen instruments until they were purple in the face, and one feared for the consequences. They also beat the drums. The gentlemen, laurel-crowned, like Cæsar, drove their fiery steeds, and with shouts and cracking of whips added an accompaniment to the orchestra. All Coutances rushed to its doors and windows; the whole population turned out. Great was the excitement. A circus had arrived and unfurled its tent upon the low-lands behind the cathedral.

Of course everyone must go; and, of course, we must not stay away, declared our worthy landlord of the Hôtel d'Angleterre. "Messieurs," said he, "il faut aller pour encourager les autres."

And we went.

Alas for the feathers and spangles, for performance, performers and audience. It rained as it had never rained before. The clouds came down in streams and rivers. And these tents are not waterproof. When we entered, the orchestra was bravely doing its best. The ladies were blowing the double basses and beating the drums, the gentlemen were playing the fiddles and the French horns. There was great noise, very little harmony, and no melody whatever. The ladies were in wonderful costumes, ready to show off on bare-backed steeds when their turn came.

The audience increased slowly but surely, until the place was half full. Every few minutes a diversion was occasioned by someone having to go lower down or higher up, to escape a small stream that suddenly penetrated the tarpaulin and began trickling down their back. The performance itself may be imagined. It was of the usual sort: a mixture of foolish clowns and wonderful riding by ladies and gentlemen in airy fairy attire. And all the while the rain came down as if it meant to drown the world; and every now and then a blinding flash of lightning, blue and steely, would be followed by a crash that seemed to shake the very foundations of the earth. Nervous ladies gave little screams and crossed themselves, and wondered why to-night of all nights the elements should be warring and raging, as if they were vowing vengeance upon mankind at large.

We pitied the performers. They looked disappointed and depressed, though they went through their work bravely. But their life, and the lives of all such, must be very hard. After the first flush of youth and the excitement of early years, it can only be the stern necessity for daily bread, for keeping the wolf from the door and the

pot-au-feu boiling, that keeps them still appearing in unbecoming costumes, and jeopardising their lives in jumping through papered hoops and alighting on bare-backed steeds—or in the sawdust.

Who knows their stories; their struggles and privations; the silent heroism with which many go through their work to provide for children, for sick husband or wife, it may be, for aged father or mother? The world is full of heroes and heroines, but we never hear of them. It is the bad and the worthless that we hear of. Evil stalks abroad with great noise, is seen and known; comes to grief and tribulation, to wreck and ruin, to prison and the gallows. But the good is silent; it makes no sign; it does not boast; it goes on its way with quiet endurance, and the grave closes over many a noble life that has formed part of the "salt of the earth."

Some such there may have been amongst the little troupe that night at Coutances, and it was sad to see them scanning the audience, and watching the curtain every time it moved in the hope that yet another was coming to swell the small rank in the "best places." To-morrow it would be a case of light coffers; the wine would have to be strongly mixed with water, repasts curtailed.

But with it all they were French, and possessed the French lightness of temperament. They cannot be long unhappy. The smallest rift in the clouds is to them the promise of a fine day, and their spirits are ever ready to rise to the surface. Indeed, they are never far below it, for they have no great depths to be stirred. Their emotions, their joys and griefs are acute rather than profound, and succeed each other rapidly as sunshine and shadow on a windy day of small clouds.

As for the audience that night, we cannot say that they greatly impressed us. If they were a fair specimen of the people of Coutances, they were sufficiently common-place. The benches given up to the élite were very empty—who would brave such warring elements?—and the humbler orders were not "fetching." There were no quaint costumes to give them picturesqueness and individuality. They were intensely amused at the performance; the clowns were a great success; they had never seen such horses and riding; they stared open-mouthed and large-eyed; but there was nothing interesting about them. Here and there, one, tired of shifting his seat and seeking a dry place, would put up an umbrella as a last resource, and this was the most original thing that we saw.

We went away perhaps the saddest of the assembly, for they all made the best of it and were happy enough, and accepted their fate; whilst we moralised, and drew pictures and comparisons, and gave the reins to our imagination, and fancied all sorts of sad little histories; and speculated upon fate and fortune, the mystery of existence, the why and the wherefore of the tragic element in life—and no solution came to our doubts and wonders. How can it do so to us finite beings, who cannot see the end from the beginning; who know

that the threads of life are often tangled, but from whom the unravelling is hidden?

We left the tent whilst the lamps were still flaring and smoking, and the performers were bowing their last good-night to the audience, and went out into the dark night. The deluge had ceased in the last few minutes, with that "irony of fate," the performers might have argued, that so often accompanies us through life. But they knew nothing of metaphysics or philosophy; they only argued that the rain had ceased, and they would play again to-morrow night; and the moon and the stars would be shining, and there would be no empty benches; the coffers would be full, the wine undiluted.

The streets of Coutances were dark, the water still ran down them in small streams; not even the cats were abroad. As we went back to the inn, we took the cathedral on our way. It looked gloomy and majestic and portentous in the darkness, a thing of grandeur and vast extent, wrapt in a profound and mysterious silence that was almost appalling. We left it to its solitary reign: the reign of centuries passed, and probably of centuries to come.

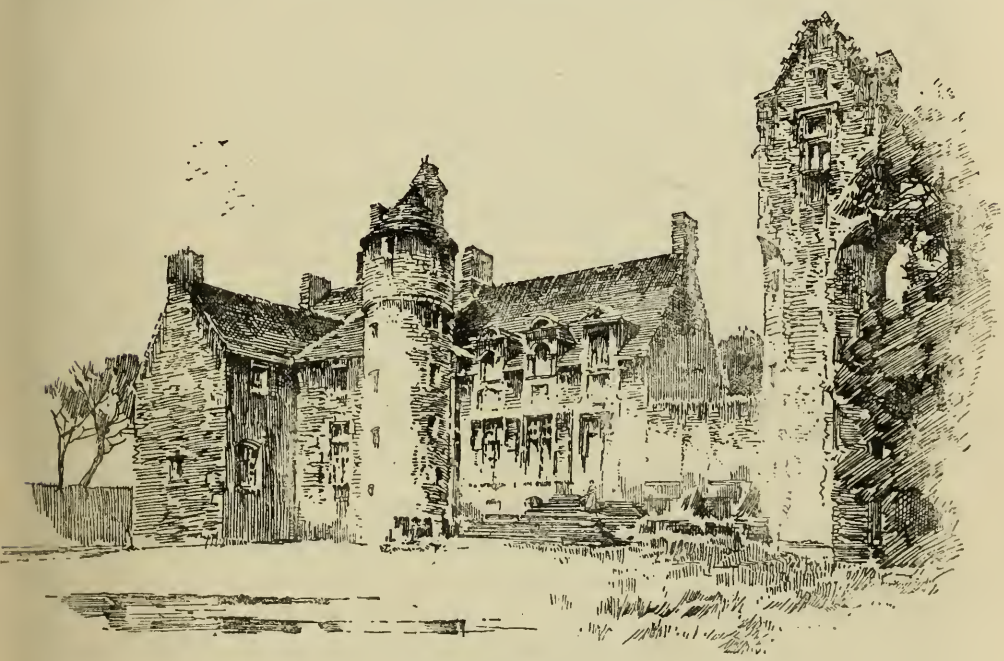
The next morning we started for a long drive into the country—a pilgrimage to the ruins of Hambye. Never was pilgrimage more happily taken. The skies had wept away all their tears the night before, and the sun shone brilliantly.

No matter which way you leave Coutances, a sharp descent to the level of the valley is inevitable. The view as you look down is lovely and exhilarating; rich and luxuriant; a picture of still country life, interrupted by few signs of man's existence. Here and there a grey stone house, a rustic cottage, stands by the roadside or perched on the hill, or nestling and almost lost amidst waving trees. But the cottages have none of the beauty and picturesqueness of our English cottages; there is no village like an English village; as a rule, no churches so beautiful as our English village churches. In this we stand pre-eminent, however we may fall short in other ways. Abroad, with few exceptions, and no matter where, the village churches are visions of ugliness. But their exceptions are so great that they make up for much of the poverty which is the rule.

We descended then to the level of the valley, and the first thing to arrest our attention was the ancient and ruined aqueduct, of which the people of Coutances are so proud. It is their first and last question—Have you seen the aqueduct? Lying between two hills, it is most romantically situated. It dates from the thirteenth century, though restored in the sixteenth, and consists of five gigantic arches, four of which are thickly covered with ivy. There are also huge detached fragments standing in isolated places. It has been said to be Roman work, but is really the work of the Middle Ages. But these ruins are always beautiful; they give a charm to the landscape, and throw over it a halo of romance; the romance of antiquity and the past; the refinement of crumbling architecture. This particular

aqueduct somehow brings to mind the wonderful Claudian aqueduct of Rome, which is one of the glories of the Appian Way. One scarcely knows why, for the Roman aqueduct stretches across an immense open plain, and cuts sharply against the background of the wonderful skies of Rome: skies of such clear and matchless blue; skies more beautiful than all others, one knows not why or wherefore. We rave about the Italian skies, but those of Rome exceed them all.

The Coutances aqueduct, on the other hand, stretches across no vast Campagna. It is very much shut in by hills, and very little of it remains; but it is a perfect and picturesque ruin; it carries you



CHÂTEAU GRÂTOT.

back to the Middle Ages, and it comes upon the traveller with a certain amount of surprise.

We turned from it down the long road which was to lead us to our destination; the ruins of the ancient Abbaye of Hambye. On our way we were to see the Château Grâtot, and soon reached the narrow lane leading to it. The heavy rains had not been without their effect, and we had to wade through a perfect slough of despond in which the little horses often stuck fast. Then we came to an ancient archway, and passing through it, gazed upon the building which, of its kind, perhaps pleased us most of any that we saw in Normandy.

It was a dream building; large and ancient; built in the fifteenth century Flamboyant style and the seventeenth century Renaissance. The dark grey tone of the walls, full of gloom and grandeur, was as perfect as anything we had ever seen. It must once have been a

stately castle surrounded by a moat, which still remains. To the right is a fine flamboyant tower, and in the centre a round tower of fifteenth century, or even earlier work. The casements have deep mouldings, and the slated roof rises above picturesque dormer windows. The centre block of the building is seventeenth century, but the walls and towers round the moat are of the fifteenth.

It would be impossible to exaggerate its beauty and imposing dignity. A flight of steps leads up to the chief entrance, and in the doorway stood a picturesque old woman, holding a large dog by her side. She was the owner of the place; for its glory has departed, and it is now nothing but a farm-house. What once must have been a courtyard is now given over to a farm pool and other farm appurtenances; and cattle wend their way through the venerable gateway to their pastures.

The old woman was much interested in us and our performances. She stood to be photographed and was in despair at not being dressed for the occasion. She talked French with a strong flavour of the patois of the country, and was much concerned and raised her hands when she heard that we were English and had come from—to her—the ends of the earth. She showed us her kitchen or house place, which was bright with pans and plates and dresser shelves, and where the immense chimney testified to a past age of utility and gigantic resources: but otherwise there was little left to remind one of its original destiny. There was a time, perhaps, when the walls were panelled and ancient furniture dignified the room; but that was past; now the walls were whitewashed, and the furniture was rough and rude. Yet it is a place of rare beauty.

An upper room of the tower was very interesting with heraldic paintings and a fireplace with a hood. On the lintel of the window was the impression of a foot, said to be that of a fair dame who once threw herself from the window into the courtyard below, and was picked up dead. Her ghost of course haunts the château.

Bending over the moat outside, washing clothes, was a fair Normandy maiden, niece to the old woman on the steps. She formed a very pretty picture, with the water before her and the old château for background; forming, as H. C. remarked, with a tender glance at the maiden, a very refined and interesting composition. She begged us to take her photograph, but first wanted to go and adorn. This we assured her was unnecessary. The only stipulation we made was that she should be careful not to move.

She was evidently conscious of her good looks, and posed with great care, seriously considering whether she should be more effective bending over the water, or wringing clothes, or leaning back in an attitude of rest, her snow white linen in a small pile on a board beside her. The latter carried the day. She undertook not to move. But just as the performance commenced a distant voice called out "Katerine! Katerine!" "Oui, mon oncle!" she cried, and at the fatal moment turned her head completely round.

In vain we assured her that the thing was spoilt, and that for so pretty a person she was very aggravating. She could not take it in, and at last begged to be redone. But this was impossible; we had not another plate to devote to her.

We departed enchanted with the place. In our enthusiasm we both declared it was worth coming all the way from England only to see it. The day, too, was perfection, and threw strong lights and shadows about the place which added to its strange beauty.

We continued our drive through a fertile and interesting country, now passing a small village, now diving into long roads between hedges. At last we reached a small and primitive town, where nothing was particularly interesting except the market-place. This was crowded with country people, for it was market day, and the scene was busy and animated. Buyers and sellers were disputing and gesticulating after the manner of their kind. Everyone was absorbed in his own concerns. The whole roadway was thronged; no one would move. Our driver was evidently accustomed to their peculiar ways. He shouted and cracked his whip, and drove rough-shod amongst them. Only when under the very horses' heads would they move, and then they sprang right and left, and used bad language and declared they would have the law of him. To us it was amusing; we sat in state and looked on with dignified approval at our coachman's manœuvres. The scene was original; the country people were interesting; their dress was peculiar, though of real costume one saw little or nothing.

We passed away from the crowd once more into the quiet roads. A sharp descent was before us, and the view over the surrounding country was magnificent. At the bottom we came to a small, somewhat poverty-stricken village, and at a very primitive inn we alighted. A very short walk, escorted by a very juvenile guide—the little son of the innkeeper—brought us to the object of our pleasant pilgrimage. A gate had to be unlocked and we passed into the hallowed precincts.

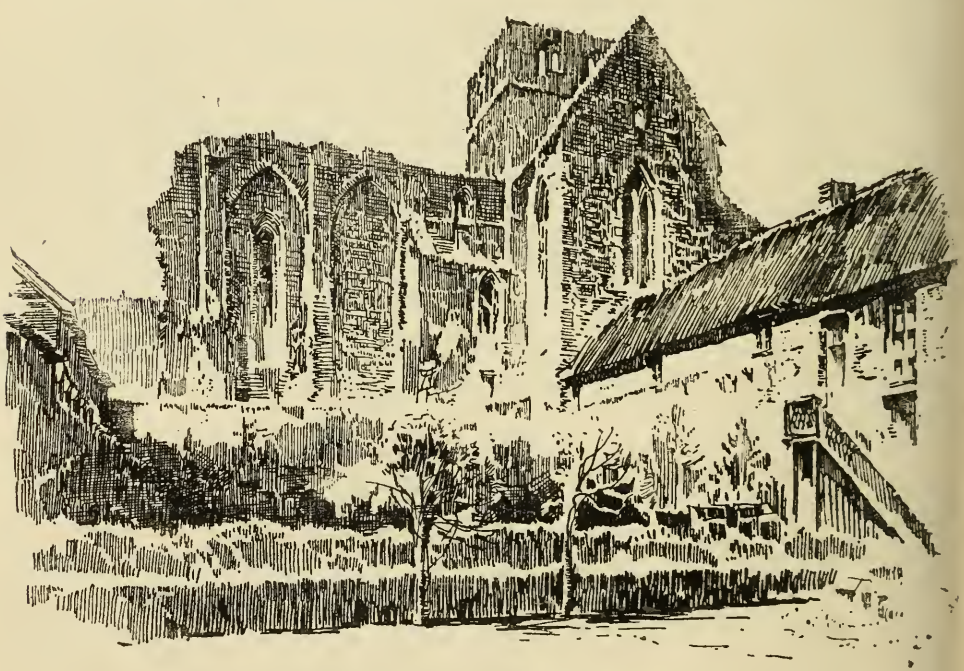
In point of ruin, it may be doubted if Normandy possesses anything so beautiful; and in Normandy or elsewhere it would be difficult to find its equal.

It is a wonderful Gothic remnant nestling in the valley of the Sienne, in so retired a corner, that it seems as if it would hide itself from the world. As a ruin it is perfect. The roof is gone and the west end, and in consequence it stands out against the clear background of sky like some gigantic, wonderful piece of fret or lace-work, full of the most ideal refinement.

It dates back to the twelfth century, though most of what is now visible is probably of the fifteenth. The walls are standing, though in a fragmentary condition, which adds to their charm. Many of the massive pillars at the east end still remain. The choir is of great extent, and is certainly one of the most ancient specimens in existence

of the pointed Norman or Transitional style. These pointed arches rest on columns or piers of great beauty, which seem to indicate the fifteenth century, the period when the Abbey was restored, if not almost rebuilt, by Joanne de Pagnel, the last representative of the founder of the Abbey. The side chapels are small and square, and of older date, combining the round and the pointed arch. In the centre of the cross is a tower resting on square piers which become octagonal at the base.

The whole ruin, like Grâtot, is a dream; you feel as if you were gazing at a vision, not at anything earthly and substantial. You may take it from numberless points of view, and from every one of them obtain a rare and unfading impression. It rises to a great height,



RUINS OF HAMBYE, SHOWING MONASTIC BUILDINGS.

and in the days of its glory must have been of lofty and magnificent proportions. You only regret that anything so glorious should be so far out of the world; so difficult of access, that when you turn your back upon it, you feel that it is probably for ever.

The buildings attached to it at right angles once formed the monastery of the Abbey. They also possess a peculiar charm, and as you gaze down upon them with the wonderful ruin for a background, you grow silent with admiration. It is now a private dwelling, or farm-house; and a lovely chapter-house at the end has become a store-house for wood. The buildings are long and grey and old-world-looking, surrounded by gardens given up to fruit and vegetables —the useful rather than the ornamental. This, too, has become a farm-house, though the people, as far as we could judge, seemed to

combine a little of the refinements of life with their occupation, and the place was well kept.

The situation of the Abbey is as lovely as it is secluded. It is surrounded by verdure, by country roads bordered by hedges and green fields; whilst hills richly covered with trees lie near at hand. Not far off there is of course the inevitable little stream, that once no doubt was well-stocked with trout, whatever it may be now. Perhaps the fishes have departed with the monks who long since have joined the land of shadows. They do not haunt the Abbey. It is too open to the sky and the air to harbour ghosts. The only shadows it contains are those thrown by the sun in declining; long shadows of pillar and arch and pointed window, with its beautiful and crumbling tracery.

Whatever the ghosts of the dead-and-gone monks might do, we ourselves haunted these wonderful precincts until the very last moment. But we had ordered luncheon at the inn overlooking the crowded market-place; and we had to depart at last. It was with great reluctance that we did so, with many a backward look: many a sigh given to the beauty on which we should probably never gaze again. For it is out of the way and out of the world; few people know of it; fewer still visit it; but it is one of those spots that once seen are loved for ever, and for ever remembered.

We turned from it at last, and walked back to the little inn, where our patient horses were waiting. It was a long climb up the hill back to the little town, of which the name has escaped me. But once there, the scene had changed. The market-place was empty, the people had departed, scarcely a stall remained, buyers and sellers had scattered. The contrast was magical, and to us disappointing, for we had hoped to get many an interesting group with a small instantaneous camera we had with us.

We went on to the inn, which was primitive and unpleasantly crowded with farmers and farmers' wives and daughters; not exhibiting any interesting Norman costumes, but got up in hats and bonnets and feathers, and all the colours of the rainbow; rough, awkward people decked out like Indian war chiefs, though a little less airy in costume; people that are the most uninteresting on the face of the earth.

We preferred waiting in the kitchen of the establishment, a curious place, with a large chimney, where the presiding goddess in the form of the landlady flourished an enormous frying-pan, and stirred up the pot-au-feu, and broke countless eggs into a basin, and initiated us into the mystery of making an omelette. Louis XV.'s famous cook could not have sent up a better. Her cooking altogether was above her establishment, and we thought her charges were decidedly above both.

The crowded dining-room was a trial, but if adversity makes one acquainted with strange bedfellows, so also does travelling. In these

days, indeed, it is the great drawback to the charm of visiting new scenes and revelling in the beauties of nature. But there can be no rose without a thorn, no pleasure without pain.

To the inn, also, we presently said farewell, and turned our faces towards Coutances. The day had given us much to remember; lovely visions to haunt our dreams and occupy our waking thoughts; recollections to lay up in store for a time, should it ever come, when the pleasures of travelling have ceased to delight, and the arm-chair and the chimney corner induce to repose; and the spirit is loosening from the things of earth, and is more frequently lost in contemplation of its far-off flight to the regions beyond the veil.

THE GUERDON.

Lily and rose in my garden,
Why are you nodding at me?
Cannot I pass to my lover
But you are watching to see?

Lily and rose—in sweet pity,
Do not keep barring my way;
I was so happy at starting—
Can't I be happy alway?

Jealous rose, clinging and clasping,
Think you such bonds are secure?
Painful may be—but not lasting,
Love hath taught how to endure.

Lily and rose, you are jealous,
Heard you my love, I suppose,
Call me "Of lilies the fairest,
Roses, the sweetest blush-rose."

Lily and rose, don't be angry,
Spare this *one* lover to me;
You have so many—I've watched them,
Butterflies, birds and a bee.

If you'll release me—as guerdon
Promise I just at the least—
Morrow is fixed for my bridal,
You shall be plucked for the feast!

A. E. G.

THAT AWFUL BACTERIA!

By Arthur Browning.

I AM an amateur actor; also as an amateur, and not for filthy lucre—except on behalf of unctuous Charity—I give some attention to photography, politics, orchids, pessimism, social reforms, and of course to literature. By profession I am an Amateur—in everything. As such, I am exquisitely hated and despised by the majority of my acquaintances; by all, except my brother amateurs. Therefore I prefer to adopt a spurious name in the narration I am about to make.

At the beginning of the new year I was staying in Devonshire with an old friend of my jovial and careless college days. Being nearly forty, an age which people over sixty cheerfully call the prime of life, I am entitled to speak critically of my early manhood. As one grows older, the vanities of life, the frivolity of nothingness and the nothingness of frivolity, become distasteful. Habit, however, is a stern master, and practice less Protean than theory. Marriage usually solves the problem: with change of state, change of life is easy. But I am a bachelor, and thereby hangs my tale.

My Devonshire host, a married man, whom I had not seen for some years, I found with a daughter, aged eighteen—how time flies! —and a son, one year younger, besides four other children. My friends were about to indulge in some private theatricals, and to "take a part" was the ostensible object of my visit. The grand old country house was full of guests, including the whole of our theatrical company; a stage had been put up in one of the rooms, and on the day following my arrival rehearsals began with solemn zeal.

It is said that marriages are made in heaven. I am of opinion that more are made on the stage than anywhere—particularly on the amateur stage. Professionals, perhaps, grow hardened by long custom; yet they, for the most part, are as exclusive in matrimonial matters as the Jews; but to the amateur a "love-part" is frequently baccalaurean suicide, and its value is keenly appreciated by match-making mammas and other society scorpions. With some misgiving, therefore, I learnt from my genial hostess that the play selected was the perennial "Pygmalion and Galatea;" that to me was allotted the part of Chrysos; that "Galatea" was a "*lovely* girl" and a "*perfect* actress"—delightfully vague phrases, typical of genial hostesses. The play had been ruthlessly cut down by a "local author" of dubious fame and talent, but of praiseworthy pseudonymity, who called the process "writing-up." The result of this mutilation was to thrust poor Chrysos into a far more prominent position than ever the original author intended; and I soon discovered that success mainly depended

upon Galatea—really a pretty, clever girl—and myself. So I studied the part very carefully, determined to do my best. I went even so far as to consult books on Greek antiquities for details of costume and character; and thus I resolved that Chrysos must have the correct Greek walking-stick or staff, the *bacteria*. It was an inspiration! How effective it would look! What a cover to stage-fright—what a medium for "business"! But how to get one?

Suddenly I remembered Halsby, one of my amateur-acting friends. His reputation chiefly rests on success obtained in performances of the dramas of Æschylus—home-made versions; I remembered that in the course of a nomadic life he had acquired a very notable article, which he called a "bacteria," and used as one in his Greek plays. I have heard that originally it was nothing more or less than a broomstick; but Halsby, with the enthusiasm of genius, took counsel with certain learned professors, and, aided by a vast number of tools and much glue, had fashioned a wondrously realistic piece of work, quite worthy of modern stage-craft. I wrote at once to Halsby, telling him of the play, and asking for the loan of his bacteria, as I had never seen one in any shop. Two days later I received the following note:—

"Dear Thompson,—I will lend you my bacteria on the 12th with pleasure. You cannot *buy* them; there is none like mine in England! On the 13th, curiously enough, I am passing through Broxhead, which you say is your station; I shall then be on my way to Gloucester to act, so kindly meet me at 12.10 *with the bacteria*, which you shall receive on the morning of the 12th. My sister, whom I think you have met, is to go with me to Gloucester, so mind you come to the station yourself.

"Yours sincerely,
"Geoffrey Halsby."

The morning of the twelfth of January duly dawned, and duly gave way to the afternoon. Soon after dusk, when I had given up all hope, the "bacteria" actually arrived, wrapped up like a fishing-rod, with instructions for use from the enthusiastic Halsby. "Pygmalion and Galatea," to my great relief, was a thorough success, and the evening's entertainment enjoyable, not only to the actors but also to the audience. Moreover, I succeeded in avoiding all amatory traps. In short, everything proceeded satisfactorily until "12.10" the following day. Then my adventures began.

I arrived at the station—with the "bacteria"—precisely five minutes after the train was due. Fortunately, or unfortunately as events may show, the train also was behind time, and it steamed up precisely five minutes late, as I reached the platform. To my astonishment, no Halsby was to be seen. After wriggling along the train, thrusting my head into various carriages in somewhat eccentric manner, I became aware of a lady, at the window of a first-class

compartment, making violent signs to attract my attention. I approached, and opened the door.

"I am Miss Halsby," she said, holding out her hand. "The bacteria ——"

At this moment the guard whistled and the engine shrieked. To avoid further loss of time the train had only stayed one minute, and was already moving. I jumped in to lay my parcel on the rack; I heard the door banged and *locked* behind me; I turned and found myself a prisoner.

Miss Halsby had been alone in the carriage when I entered, and, for some seconds after we had left the station, we gazed at one another in mute dismay. Presently Miss Halsby broke the spell by a merry peal of laughter. In spite of my annoyance, in spite of the suspicion with which I regarded the whole of her sex, I could not prevent myself from thinking how fascinating she looked.

"What are you going to do?" she asked.

"Where is your brother?" I rejoined.

We laughed absurdly. Recovering, I repeated my question, still standing, for I felt an insane desire to take a header through the window. Somehow, the idea of another stoppage never presented itself; I, a bachelor, appeared eternally doomed to the terrible companionship of an unprotected female.

"My brother was suddenly seized with influenza yesterday afternoon. We telegraphed to Gloucester, and the people there have found a substitute, and I," she added with a twinkle of the eyes, "have got the 'bacteria,' as Geoff. *will* call it, so it's all right. But won't you sit down? We don't stop now for nearly an hour."

This brought me to my senses. The rugs were re-arranged, I was persuaded by my companion to light my pipe, and we prepared to spend as comfortable a time as possible. We had met at a dance some five years previously, when Miss Halsby was only just "out." I confessed frankly that I did not at first remember her, to which she retorted by saying that she only knew me by the "bacteria." That awful "bacteria!" The cause of my unlooked-for journey. How little I knew what was coming!

"Are you going to perform in the Gloucester theatricals?" I presently asked.

"No; I am only going to assist in the preparations. I expect there will be plenty to do, and women always have to do everything."

"Yes," I replied drily, in a tone that might mean anything: "they generally have a finger in the pie, whatever it is."

"You're very rude, Mr. Thompson. But, seriously, don't you think women are peculiarly suited to looking after the details of things, which men never think of?"

"My dear Miss Halsby, woman herself is merely a detail!"

"Really, Mr. Thompson"—with pretended indignation—"I refuse to utter another word."

I smoked on in silence, awaiting her next remark. I knew it would soon come.

"I begin to think you are that most odious kind of man, or so-called man, a 'woman-hater.'"

"I have been a bachelor all my life," I replied, humbly.

"Anyone could see that."

"Perhaps I may yet learn wisdom. But your brother, is he very bad?"

"The usual symptoms, so graphically described in all the papers. He thinks he is at death's door, but he will be all right in a day or two."

"How very heartless! Have *you* had it?"

"No, and I don't mean to. It's a great deal to do with the nerves. Have you?"

"Not yet, but I shall; and so will you."

We both laughed.

"It comes on *very* suddenly in some cases," I went on, "and it may come at any moment. It is a veritable sword of Damocles."

"Well, I'm not afraid of it, so we'll change the subject. Have you had any skating?"

The conversation flowed on. We discussed the relative value of acmes and other skates, the latest novels, the theatres, and so forth. After my imprisonment had thus lasted a pleasant half-hour, my companion bade me open the window. I did so. It was bitterly cold—freezing.

"Are you ill?" I asked. Miss Halsby was white as the scarf around her neck.

"I feel faint; please shut the window, it is so cold."

My fears were thoroughly awakened. As I closed the window our eyes met.

"I've / "You've got it!" we exclaimed simultaneously.

I arose and wrapped her entirely in rugs. She was shivering from head to foot, and in her present abject misery formed a melancholy contrast to her appearance a short time before. I produced from my pocket a flask of whisky-and-water, which I had heard was the orthodox drink recommended by the faculty.

"I am going to be your doctor. You must please take some of this."

After considerable difficulty I prevailed upon Miss Halsby to sip the whisky in feminine fashion. She pronounced herself better, but the result was not obvious, and by the time we were due at the junction for Gloucester, my fair comrade was very limp and helpless. As we entered the station she fainted in my arms. Here was a situation for a bachelor of nearly forty years' standing!

An hour later Miss Halsby and myself were once more in a first-class compartment, engaged—I mean the compartment, not the occupants. I had carried her to the nearest waiting-room, and sent for a doctor. He brought her round, pronounced her a victim to the epidemic, and recommended an instant return home. I found

that there was a train back almost immediately, secured a compartment, and ultimately delivered my fair but feeble companion in safety to her parents. Then, as in a dream, I returned to Broxhead, and that night at dinner I posed as a hero for the first time in my life.

I found my rooms in town strangely dull on leaving my friends at Broxhead. My thoughts would persist in running to that unexpected railway journey. In spite of a correspondence on orchids in the *Daily Wire*, in spite of the speech by a Bishop on Pessimism, and an article on Socialism by a Duke, I felt things were not as they had been. I could say, with Wordsworth, "There hath past away a glory from the earth." The climax came a week ago, when I found myself actually refusing an invitation to "take a part." I was seriously considering the advisability of consulting a physician and being ordered abroad for change of air, or to drink the waters, when, yesterday morning, I received this note from Halsby :—

"DEAR THOMPSON,—I cannot forgive myself for never having written to thank you for your kindness to my sister during the I—— (I dare not write the word). We have just returned from a month's convalescence at the sea-side, and we want you to come and spend a few days with us. Do come, and at once. And stay as long as you can.

"Yours gratefully,

"GEOFFREY HALSBY."

After due deliberation, I have decided to go to-morrow. Am I—horrid phrase—in love? I do not know. As yet I have made no profession of it. I am still an Amateur—in everything!

SONNET.

To learn, we should forget. Too much we know
To see the simplest truths. We have one day—
One morn, one noon, one night on earth we stay.
Yet noon from morn, and from noon night, to show
We ever seek. With doubt perplexed we go,
Much wondering in our poor childish mind,
Unlike grey dawn of morn, hot noon to find.
And thus we vex and weary life ; thus flow
Our hours ; thus our little day is worn,
And dark night closing round, untaught we stand
Upon the threshold of the other morn.
Then, like poor mariner cast on strange land
He knows not of, so by Time's silent strand
We sit us down, bewildered and forlorn!

JULIA KAVANAGH.

THE END OF THE TRAGEDY.

"Highlands, Tuesday.

"DEAR OLD BLAIR,—I have just heard you are back again in England, and feel inclined to begin in Bob Acres' fashion, that you did not let me know of your return. Will Monday next suit you for your long-promised visit here? We are just by ourselves, and not going into society at present, so it is a horribly selfish thing to ask you down. But if you want a thorough rest after your globe-trotting and are willing to perform an act of Christian charity at one and the same time, now is your chance. Wire me you'll take the two o'clock from Cannon Street, and I will drive in to meet you at this end.

"Yours ever,

"WILLIAM SEAGRAVE.

"Mind you come. I shan't take *No* for an answer."

This was the note I found awaiting me at the club one day last July, and I promptly sent off a hearty acceptance. I had been so rushed from pillar to post during the last four years in my capacity of private doctor to an erratic old man who was apparently anxious to discover the secret of perpetual motion, that the chief charm of the invitation to Highlands was its alleged quietness. Besides, I was really anxious to see Will Seagrave again, for our friendship dated from Rugby days, and until his marriage, which occurred some six months before I fell in with the old man, the cure of whose imaginary woes was to make my fortune (*N.B. It didn't!*), he and I had always got on admirably together. Whether we were to get on quite so well now that there was a Mrs. Will was of course an open question.

By the bye, it seemed odd that there was no mention of her in his letter. For the first three years I had heard from him pretty frequently while I had been abroad, and had grown rather tired of the "Olive says this," and "Olive does the other," with which his letters were filled. She had been a young widow with one little boy when Will had married her, and it had sometimes occurred to me to wonder if he ever regretted that the fine estate of which he was temporary master must necessarily be inherited by Guy Cheshunt's lad instead of his own. Apparently he never thought of it. Little Robin Cheshunt seemed to have quite as firm a hold upon his affection as had his own two youngsters; and no miss in her teens could possibly have found more to say about her first lover than Will Seagrave of his beautiful wife. I grew decidedly tired of it after a bit. After all, one can have, especially when one doesn't know them, too much of other men's wives.

"She might as well have sent me a message, or Will might have invented it for her," I thought, for, for a man, he was rather unusually strong in little politenesses of that sort. "I suppose there has been a death in the family, if they are not going out much at present Wonder who it is!"

Three days later I and my traps were deposited at the country station where Will Seagrave was to have met me, but by some mischance he had not arrived. Having a righteous horror of country flys, and remembering Will's unpunctuality of old, I determined to wait where I was until either he or a messenger from Highlands should put in an appearance. I had just lighted my second cigarette when a couple of men came out of the station hotel, by the doorway of which I was lounging, and having nothing better to do, I stood listening to what they were saying. They were apparently local tradesmen who had been having a heated argument over their pipes, and each was unwilling to leave the other unconvinced.

"I tell you," said one, striking his hands together impatiently—"I tell you it is pure nonsense. It don't stand to no manner of reason. It is four months now since that poor little chap was killed, and don't you think that if he'd been shot by a passing tramp as you may say, why, that it would have come out long before now?"

"That's true enough," said the elder man more mildly, "but who says it hasn't come out? I says now as I said at the inquest, that it was Jake Ilford. Everyone for miles round knew that there was bad feeling between Mr. Seagrave and him. Everyone knew that it was through Mr. Seagrave he was clapped in gaol, and that he swore to do him a nasty turn when he could."

"So he did, so he did," said the first speaker, as though grudging him the concession, while my cigarette went out unheeded in my puzzled surprise. "But if you mean to explain that by saying that Jake Ilford comes out of prison, and creeps along to Highlands that March night, and takes and shoots down Master Robin from behind a hedge like as he would a rabbit, and then goes on his way all unconcerned like—why then I say again it don't stand to no manner of reason."

"It stands more to reason than to say a bit of a child like that shot hisself," said his companion, testily, "and hasn't Ilford been missing ever since?"

Here a friend hailed them from the other side of the road, and they went away from the hotel, and out of earshot.

Left to myself, I turned back into the station, and paced the platform in the direst perplexity. Little Robin Cheshunt was killed, shot, as my unconscious informer had said, like a rabbit, and the name of his murderer was still an open question. So much I had gathered from the men's talk, but they had only said enough to make me intensely anxious to hear more. Who was this Jake Ilford whom gossip accredited with so strong a hatred of the owner of Highlands that

the death of the little heir was laid to his charge? How came it that Seagrave, a rich man, had not been able to work the law sufficiently to capture him? And why on earth—my curiosity giving way to a feeling of resentment—why on earth had he asked me down to a grief-stricken house without giving me any inkling of how gloomy would be my visit? At this moment a porter came up and touched his cap.

"Beg pardon, sir, but if you're the gentleman for Highlands, Mr. Seagrave says would you kindly step this way. He can't leave the horses."

Through the open door I saw a pale-faced man, dressed in deep mourning, who was sitting on the box-seat of a phaeton; but it was not until my new guide shouldered my traps and started off in its direction that I realised the sad-looking man at whom I had been gazing was no other than my old friend. Good heavens, how he had changed! He looked a good ten years older than his thirty-six years, and from a robust man of medium height, he seemed literally to have shrunk in stature until he gave one the idea of having just recovered from a serious illness.

"Have you got those flowers for your mistress? Are they packed safely?" I heard him say to the groom as I came up, and I declare I welcomed the words with relief. Finding he was still full of his wife and her wants seemed a tangible proof that this shadow of his former self was really and truly Seagrave.

"Hullo, Will. You're a nice sort of fellow to volunteer to meet one."

His thin face flushed with pleasure as he leaned forward and grasped my hand.

"My watch has just come back from the cleaner's, and consequently has taken to a habit of stopping. I am awfully sorry to be late," he said. "Get in. The horses won't stand."

Apparently they would not, for I had barely cleared the wheel when they broke into a spirited trot.

"You can't think how glad I am to see you, Blair," he went on. "We never go up to town now, and I haven't seen a friend here for months past."

"No? You have been in trouble. I have been hearing something about it."

He jumped at my words as though I had given him an electric shock.

"You have heard about it—where? Did they speak of it at the station?"

In turning to answer him, I caught sight of the groom, who was leaning well forward from the back seat. It was the first good view I had had of him, and while I was answering my friend's questions, and telling him of the men's talk at the hotel door, I was all the time cudgelling my brains to remember where on earth I had seen his

servant before. My unusually good memory for faces is a pet vanity of mine, and it annoyed me that, though I could have sworn to the hatchet nose and deep-set eyes of the man behind us, I could neither recall his name nor where it was that I had seen him. Finally, I gave it up, and turned my undivided attention to his master.

"Of course it is an intensely painful subject for both of us," Seagrave was saying; "but I must tell you about it now, because I am particularly anxious you should not speak of it before the wife."

I muttered something, and nodded comprehendingly. He need not have alarmed himself, I thought; it was hardly a subject one would care to discuss with any mother.

"It was in March last," he went on, still keeping his eyes steadily upon his horses' ears; "our dear little lad had run out into the garden in the twilight. He was shot. We have never been able to find the man who fired at him."

Hearing the story like this, wrung reluctantly, as it were, from his lips, the curt recital sounded infinitely more impressive than when eked out by the gestures and comments of the tradespeople, and I felt a sudden rush of very real sympathy.

"You poor old fellow! I am most heartily sorry to hear of this. Who found the poor child?"

"I did." He shivered as he spoke.

At this moment I again caught a glimpse of the quiet face of the listening groom. The straight-cut lips were curling in a faint smile, and the contrast to the pale, suffering face at my side made me feel positively uncomfortable. Dear old Will tried to turn the conversation into a more cheerful vein by pointing out the various beauties of the drive, but I only answered him in monosyllables. That evil smile haunted me, and for the present, at least, had put ordinary talk out of the question.

As we entered the house, I told Seagrave that it annoyed me not to be able to recollect the name of his groom, as I was certain I had seen him before.

"Perhaps you have," he said carelessly. "We have only had him a week. He is a Londoner whom my wife was interested in somehow—the brother of a former servant of hers, I fancy. Tom Rutton is his name."

He turned out of the square hall through one of the many doors which opened upon it, and in another moment I was shaking hands with my hostess.

"Olive, this is Dr. Royden. You have often heard me speak of Blair Royden, my little fag at Rugby," said Seagrave in oddly persuasive tones, which somehow gave me the impression he had been dubious about my welcome, and then he began hastily unpacking the hamper of flowers we had brought with us from the little town.

While he fussed about the what-nots for specimen vases in which

to arrange them, and chatted briskly about his lack of manners in arriving too late for my train, I occupied myself in studying his wife. She was a tall, slight woman, with a quantity of dull fair hair, and a languid, graceful manner of moving. It struck me that under any other circumstances I should mentally have summed her up as singularly beautiful, but there was something about the waxen skin and general inertness which commanded a feeling of awe rather than of admiration. In her heavy pall-like draperies she looked as if all the vitality and spring of youth had gone from her—as if in all but mere actual breath the woman were dead already.

When, with the help of the flowers, we were getting through a rather laboured chit-chat, I caught the sound of unsteady little feet in the hall beyond, and through the open doorway I caught sight of a couple of white-frocked children. Welcoming them as a happy break in a very stiff quarter of an hour, I called out to them, and the elder of the two crept nearer the threshold.

"Is my papa there?" she demanded.

"Yes, and mamma too. Come and make friends."

The bright little face clouded instantly, and in an almost inaudible whisper she was endeavouring to make me understand that she must not come in unless "papa" were alone, when her mother's voice cut her short.

"Go away at once, and take Willie with you. You have no business here," she said, speaking to her little daughter in exactly the same dull, monotonous voice in which she had been speaking to me; and it was pitiful to see the scared expression with which the children trotted away. And this was the wife of whom Will Seagrave had written so proudly!

I felt rather at a loss for words when presently he took me up to my room, and shut the door upon us with an interrogatory "Well?"

His eager, questioning gaze reminded me of the school-days when I, his junior by some years, was first promoted to the post of general adviser and father confessor. I remember that then I used to explain this preference to myself in a way which was by no means unflattering to my self-esteem; but since then I have modified my opinion, and think that as a boy he consulted me for the very same reasons which had now induced him to invite me to Highlands. He felt a characteristic necessity to confide in someone, and I possessed the valuable quality of being able to hold my tongue.

I pretended to misunderstand that "Well?" and flinging up my window to look at the view, I asked: "Well, what?"

"What do you think of my wife? How does she strike you? Do you think she is in bad health?" All his easy brightness had disappeared, and he fronted me with the same harassed expression I had observed at the station. "You are a doctor, Blair. You must know," he added.

"My dear Will," I remonstrated, "I have only just seen Mrs.

Seagrave. I can't tell you more than anyone else could tell you. She is evidently suffering from mental depression, and will probably grow stronger and happier as time goes on, and she gets over the shock of her boy's death."

"That she never will," said Seagrave emphatically, and then he abruptly changed the subject. "If you find the house even duller than you expected, promise me that you won't leave us at all events under the week."

Now as that was exactly what I was intending to do, I suppose I must have looked somewhat taken aback, for Seagrave at once continued to press the matter so earnestly that in the end I yielded. I felt I should be horribly in the way, but, after all, of that he must be the best judge.

It was as well he had bound me by a promise, or, undoubtedly, on the third day at latest I should have started back to town. The whole atmosphere of the place worried and depressed me, and I felt that my temper was rapidly growing as uncertain as Mrs. Seagrave's own. Certainly it was anything but a cheerful visit.

Whenever he was with his wife, Seagrave was, to all appearance, enabled to throw off his own troubles, and, with a devotion I have never seen equalled, set himself to the task of wooing her, if not to brighter spirits, at all events to a more resigned state of mind. But when he was alone with me he gave himself up unreservedly to his grief.

I do not think the loss of his little step-son had much to do with it. He was infinitely sorry, of course, but not even his love for his own children counted one feather-weight as compared with his love for his wife. The latter he simply worshipped, and as the days went slowly by, my position in the household was not rendered more comfortable by my growing conviction that she was not worth it. Were all her troubles, her irritability, and periods of intense nervous excitement—were they solely due to little Robin? Seagrave of course said yes, and would spend hours in narrating how blithe and full of life she used to be, how fond of gaieties of all sorts, and yet how devoted a wife and mother. Still I had my own doubts, although naturally I kept them to myself.

It was thinking of Rutton, the groom, which first put the suspicion into my head. The Seagraves' indoor man had fallen ill, and instead of engaging a new servant, Mrs. Seagrave had insisted upon Rutton filling his place. Consequently, I saw a good deal of him, and it soon became a source of wonderment to me how it was possible for Seagrave to have the man about the house as much as he did, without noticing the very evident understanding which existed between him and his mistress. This was through no fault of Rutton's, who, though an abominably bad servant, as far as a knowledge of his duties went, was always quietly respectful and apparently unconcerned. But Mrs. Seagrave had by no means so perfect a command of her-

self. At meals, for instance, she would follow him about with her eyes, until her husband's blindness became a thing to marvel at; and once when, deceived by a resemblance of doors, I hastily entered her boudoir, it was to find them talking earnestly together. I caught something about "your husband might notice it," before her exclamation, "I thought the door was locked!" brought my stammered apologies, but the incident certainly served to strengthen my theories.

At the end of a week I was ready to laugh myself to scorn for having jumped to such romantic conclusions, for it was then that it suddenly flashed across me where it was that I had seen the fellow before. This time it was not only possible but imperative to speak to Seagrave about him, and, at the risk of adding to his perplexities, I attacked the subject that very night. It was late, the house was quiet, and we two were in the smoking-room.

"What are you after now?" Seagrave asked curiously, as I stole softly to the one door and glanced right and left in the passage before reclosing and locking it. "You don't imagine any of the servants are staying out of their beds to listen to our instructive conversation, do you?"

"I like to make sure," I said equably. "I have something to tell you;" and then I followed his example and proceeded to light up, glancing at him as I did so.

He was looking better to-night, I fancied. For the first time since I had been with them, his wife had somewhat shaken off her lethargy, and had actually taken her share in a newspaper discussion we had had during dinner. As a natural result, Seagrave was looking more like himself again than I had yet seen him, and as he leaned indolently back in his old arm-chair, and puffed away silently at his meerschaum, he looked both quiet and contented.

"What is the important piece of news?" he said, lazily.

"This. I have set my mind at rest at last. You remember how it bothered me not to be able to recall where I had seen Rutton?"

Seagrave nodded.

"Well, now I know. Soon after I reached London this last time, I went to call on a man named Drayton—I don't think you know him. As I was waiting in the drawing-room, my friend passed through the conservatory which joins it, talking to this identical man. He told me afterwards that the fellow had been instrumental in recovering some jewellery for him, and I suppose he had called that particular morning to receive a *douceur* of some sort for his pains."

Seagrave stared at me blankly. "*Rutton* had?" he said, slowly. "My groom?"

"Yes, but don't you see, Will, he is only shamming as a servant in Mrs.—I mean in someone's pay! I would swear to his face. Rutton is a detective."

"*A detective?*" He started violently forward, gripping the arms

of the chair as he did so. His pipe had fallen to the floor, and lay in atoms at his feet; his face had blanched. We sat staring at each other for a full minute, while a horrible, sickening dread was slowly forcing itself upon me: and then the nervous grip relaxed, and he fell back in his chair, covering his face with his hands. "Good heavens!" he groaned, "it has come at last! She suspects me."

"That you, *you* killed her child?"

He must have read the question in my eyes, for but for his laboured breathing the silence remained unbroken.

"Yes, it was I who killed him."

He answered me in the hoarse, unnatural whisper we sometimes hear from the lips of the insane, and then he broke into such terrible weeping as I pray I may never hear again.

Phew! I rose from my seat, and walked to the other end of the long room. I felt an unconquerable impulse to place as much distance as possible between myself and this old friend of mine, who seemed to have grown suddenly so unfamiliar. Why, oh why had he done this thing?

It was for only an instant that this feeling mastered me, for as soon as I could collect my scattered thoughts, it was to blame myself for the momentary disloyalty. It must have been an accident, of course, and the only question that remained was, why he had not at once avowed it. I came back again to my place, and laid my hand upon Seagrave's shoulder.

"Come, rouse up, old fellow," I said, speaking as cheerily as I knew how, although, even to my own ears, the attempt sounded rather a failure. "You must tell me all about it. You ought to have told me before."

He looked up at last, but there was a dazed expression on his face as though he had not fully heard what I had said.

"Do you think Olive knows, or do you think she only suspects?"

"Neither," I said, stoutly. "She merely feels that sufficient search is not being made for—for the one who did it, and so she is trying on her own account. It is just the stupid sort of thing a woman does do."

"Then why didn't she tell me?"

I was posed for a moment, and then I said hurriedly, "Oh, well, you see, the poor little chap wasn't your own son. Mrs. Seagrave might very well feel that, with the best intentions in the world, your love could not equal hers. She might imagine you would consider it useless to continue the search after four months."

There was a long pause before he spoke again; evidently he was bracing himself to the confession of that sad day's work. He began at last, in a hesitating, self-communing sort of way, but after a little his voice grew clearer and he went on more graphically. The plunge once made, it was evidently a relief, as in the old boyish days, to take me into his confidence.

"It was in March. A big dog, belonging to one of the farmers about, had annoyed us and frightened the children by continually leaping over the wall which divides us from the lane. And it was then, when I was up in town one day, that I brought a pistol back with me. It was not with any idea of the animal that I got it, but I had had threatening letters from a poacher whom I had once been the means of sending to gaol, and I thought it was as well to have one. These country lanes are lonely at night, and sometimes I am driving late."

"So you brought it back here with you?" I asked the question after the silence had grown so lengthy that I thought he had forgotten my presence. He roused himself with a start.

"Yes. I got home about five o'clock: it was just getting dusk. Olive was out, paying calls, and she had taken our little Dulcie with her in the carriage. You have seen how she treats the child now, but in those days she idolised her only less than she did Robin. I asked for him, and I was told he was at nursery tea, so I went into the drawing-room to wait for Olive's return, and seated myself by the open window, on the look-out for the carriage. I was feeling fagged and ill-tempered. The business on which I had been up to town had gone all wrong: I was anxious about Olive, who had a cough, and ought to have been home before dusk; and I was rendered more irritable every moment by the ear-splitting noises which came from the adjoining field. The pupils at the vicarage had erected a sort of amateur shooting gallery there, and were supposed to be practising."

"Go on, dear old man, go on. And then?"

"Then, as I sat by the open window examining my new purchase, the dog—a surly brute that ought to have been chained—came bounding over our wall. It all happened in a flash. Maddened at the cool disregard of the master who let it wander about loose at its own sweet will, and with a half-thought of how terrible the consequences might be if the huge beast came down like that upon our little ones, I raised my hand and I fired. And then——. Oh, Blair"—he caught my hand with a convulsive shudder—"think of the horror of it all! At the same instant that I pulled the trigger, a little white-clad golden-haired child came running between me and the beast at which I was pointing. The sharp angle of the bow-window had hidden him from me, and—and—he died without a struggle or a cry. I tore madly over the grass, and reached our darling. A smile was still resting on the dear face, and as I lifted him in my arms the little dimpled hands fell loosely forward on to my neck as they had clasped me hundreds of times before. I had thought for nothing but his mother, and how to get him safely in the house before she should come back and find him. The dining-room—you have not seen it; we never go into it now—was the nearest to me, and I carried the tiny, motionless figure in through the French window and laid it upon the long table. As I did so, I caught the

sound of wheels upon the drive, and I rushed out through the hall to the front door to meet my wife and in some sort prepare her for the shock. The carriage held only Dulcie and her nurse. Her mistress, so the woman told me, had got out half-way up the drive to look at some newly-planted ferns, and had entered the house through the dining-room window."

"And found the boy?"

My breathless question was simply answered by a grave "*Yes.*" He had so often lived over again the whole terrible scene that the narration of it had no longer any power to stir him. It was too painful, too horrible, to find vent in mere wordy excitement. Presently he went on speaking:

"When I got back into the room I found her like a mad thing. Holding the child to her and covering him with kisses; then laying him down, chafing the little stiffening hands, or searching wildly for mark or sign of the wound; then again calling on him to speak to her. 'Look at poor mother, Robin. Darling, speak to mother.' She turned and clutched me as I ran up to her. 'He has been shot, Will, he has been shot,' she said, and then she grew suddenly quiet. She nestled up to me, recoiling from the lad as if in horror, although her eyes were fascinated upon the small round hole above his breast. '*He is dead*,' she shrieked at last, and then breaking from me she threw herself again upon the child, praying God that she might be helped to avenge him, that He would grant her strength to track down the murderer, and take his life as he had taken her boy's. Blair, it was fearful."

He stopped abruptly. Great drops of moisture were upon his forehead, and even his lips were white. To such a man, and loving his wife as passionately as he did, the scene must, as he said, have been fearful.

"You could not tell her then, of course, Will," I said pitifully; "but afterwards? Surely you could have told her afterwards?"

"I dared not," he said thickly; "I was afraid. Olive would have hated me, and I dared not risk it."

"But the pistol? Didn't they try for some weapon at the inquest which the bullet might fit? It was in your possession."

"No, it was found in the lane. I must have rushed up to Robin with the thing still smoking in my hand, and then have thrown it from me. I had picked it up second-hand in a shop in the city. No one knew I had ever thought of buying such a thing: there was no possibility of tracing it."

"But I—But surely someone must have noticed the report?"

"How could they with that perpetual firing in the next field?"

I sat silently thinking, until at length I recalled the gossip of the townspeople. "Who is Jake Ilford? How came his name to be mixed up in it?"

"He is the poacher I told you of, who, I believe, was the man

who wrote me those threatening letters. They came anonymously, of course, but Ilford had a grudge against me for what he chose to consider hard dealing. He was seen hanging about our grounds a day or two before, and at the inquest a witness who had seen him started the rumour that he was probably the guilty man. They tried to find him, but he had gone away from here before they were on his track. He had some relatives in America, and it is thought he went to them. Blair! what shall I do?"

The sudden question was fraught with all the anguish which hitherto he had successfully kept under control, and the poor fellow held out his hands to me as if his salvation depended upon my answer. I grasped them firmly.

"Get rid of this Rutton first of all," I said earnestly. "He can't find out anything—there is nothing to find out, but the knowledge he is in the house will so alter you that you will betray your own secret. And then go abroad with Mrs. Seagrave, and live in some big town. The bustle and novelty of the place will serve to distract her even if you keep quite to yourselves. Nothing but time can help either of you, but matters will never grow better if you live here with your mind continually dwelling upon the same subject. Six months will make a wonderful difference. You will find her sufficiently like her old self for life to be at all events peaceful again."

He snatched gratefully at the first ray of hope which had come to him for months.

"Do you really think so, Blair?" he cried.

Barely had the words left his lips when I caught the sound of a light foot-fall in the passage, and I had hardly time to move away from him and plunge into some irrelevant question before the door opened softly, and Mrs. Seagrave came in.

I felt as if my heart had stopped beating as I glanced at her, but no, she had evidently not heard anything. She was restless and ill at ease; I could see that by the way the thin hands were pulling at the lace upon the soft white wrapper, but that she had not been spying upon us was proved by her first words.

"Do come to bed, Will," she said querulously. "It is nearly two o'clock, and I am tired of waiting."

Seagrave rose at once. "Why, my darling, you should not have done that. Haven't you been to sleep?"

"What do you mean? Have I not as much right to sit up as you have?" she demanded sharply.

I heard afterwards that she had employed the time by going over the whole miserable story again with Rutton, and her nerves were consequently strung to the highest possible pitch.

"It is quite my fault, Mrs. Seagrave," I said remorsefully. "I have been keeping Will up to listen to my stupid traveller's tales. I will say good-night now, if you will allow me. Good-night, Will, old man."

"Oh, don't go, Dr. Royden," she said at once. "I feel so wide awake now that I would rather sit and talk to you both. See! shall I fill you a fresh pipe? Will used to say I was a very good hand at filling a pipe. I almost think I could smoke one to-night," and she went into peals of laughter.

I did not like it at all. Her eyes, which were usually so lustreless, were now glittering brightly, and though her laugh was noisy, it was utterly mirthless.

"Please sit down again," she repeated, more imperatively, and I obeyed. "You shall tell me some traveller's tales too. Or no, I know nothing of foreign life; let us talk about London."

I telegraphed my amazement to Seagrave, but he was leaning his head upon his hand and I could not see his face. Neither did he take any part in the conversation that followed, never rousing from his moody silence while his wife chatted gaily about the theatres, the rival Hungarian bands, and the charm of little Hoffmann's playing. Had it not all seemed so unnatural I should have been well entertained, but as it was ——

I hurried through my smoke, and again tried to make my escape. "It is really so late, Mrs. Seagrave."

"Is it? I suppose it is," she answered vacantly, and to my dismay the brilliant, incisive speech had again been changed to the dull, monotonous tones I had learned to dread. "Do you know if the maids have gone to bed? I suppose Rutton is still up?"

"Rutton? Ah, I want to talk to you about that man, Olive."

It was done before I could stop him. Evidently he had been working himself up to follow out my suggestion, and had caught at the name as an opportune chance. Unhinged as he was by what he had just told me, nerveless as the recital had left him, it was the very worst moment he could have chosen to make the trial of his strength. Possibly he felt it easier to speak at a time when my presence would necessarily cut the matter short, but I knew it was fatal when I looked back from his face to hers. Into Mrs. Seagrave's had crept—how shall I describe it?—a sort of horrible expectancy which carved deep lines about her mouth, and gleamed sullenly in her eyes. She seemed to be lying in wait for her husband.

"Yes? What about him?" she asked, in a low, strained voice.

"I think we had better get rid of him, dear." Seagrave never raised his eyes from the carpet at his feet. "I heard to-day that James" (the man-servant whom Rutton had temporarily replaced) "is fit for work again. We should not be acting fairly by him if we did not offer h m his own post."

"Why do you want him to go? Why? why?" the rapid question cut into his carefully-weighed words as though their import had not reached her ears. In the breathless silence that followed, she rose from her chair, and with an unsteady, wavering run crossed to her husband's side. "Why? Why?" she repeated wildly, laying her

burning hands upon his bowed head. "Look up, Will, look at me. Do you know who Rutton is?"

"Will! Rouse yourself!" I cried sharply. "You have just been telling Mrs. Seagrave why you wish the servant to go." But neither of them heeded me.

"You *shall* look at me," she muttered, and in another moment she had forced his head upward, and their eyes had met.

It would have been a long and harrowing scene upon the stage: in real life it was mercifully short. After that one searching look into those eyes which so furtively scanned hers, and in which despair was only too plainly written, Mrs. Seagrave stepped back for half a pace and put her hands convulsively to her throat.

"You—you killed—him!" she gasped, swaying for a moment helplessly to and fro. "My—my ——" Before I could catch her she had fallen, and lay like a dead thing at our feet.

In the course of the following day I started the detective back to town. When I told him that if I pulled his unfortunate employer through the illness of which last night's fit had been the precursor it would only be to install her in some asylum, and when he saw the formidable array of physicians and nurses who were wired for from town, I think he felt he had made rather a mess of this, his first, murder case. I told him that, fearing her mind was giving way, Mr. Seagrave had sent for me to live in the house, and so keep better watch over my patient. Of course I had immediately recognised the supposed groom, for I had seen him at Mr. Drayton's—how amazed the fellow looked—but I had kept my own counsel, as any thwarting of the poor lady's plans might have hastened the disease.

So I talked, and so in the face of present events he was forced to believe. He went away reviling himself for having given credence to the vagaries of a failing brain; and I for once breathed the easier for his absence.

Matters rest very much as he left them. After a weary two months' confinement, which she passed in the belief that little Robin was alive and hidden away from her, Mrs. Seagrave died in the asylum where we had placed her. Will is still travelling in the East: the children have been placed with friends. I please myself sometimes by imagining that, when time shall have blunted his double sorrow, and Dulcie and her little brother have grown to a more companionable age, the three may live together again. But if the children can persuade him to give up his wandering life, they will have to content themselves with some foreign city. He will never come home.

MABEL E. WOTTON.

THE ARGOSY.

SEPTEMBER, 1890.

THE HOUSE OF HALLIWELL.

BY MRS. HENRY WOOD, AUTHOR OF "EAST LYNNE."

CHAPTER XXIII.

AT MIDDLEBURY.

SEVERAL years again passed, and we need take no particular note of them; for they were pregnant with little of moment to the branches of the Halliwell family: afterwards, events came crowding thick and fast. Hester was now getting to be a woman nearer fifty than forty, those who were boys and girls were growing into men and women, and little children to boys and girls.

A tragical event, full of mystery and suspicion, occurred about this time in Dr. Goring's family. It will be better (as we have done once before) to let Hester relate it in her own words.

I did not often go down to Middlebury: about once in every three or four years. Dr. Goring (he was not "Dr." Goring: only "Matthew Goring, surgeon and apothecary;" but the townsfolk in Middlebury would style him "Dr.", as is the case sometimes in country places) and Mary had been married about sixteen years, when she had a dangerous illness, and, as it was our midsummer holidays and leisure time with me, I went to Middlebury. They had then six children (without counting the infant who had just died), Mary, the eldest, a gentle, good girl of fifteen, just like her mother. I found my sister ill indeed, and for the first fortnight I did little but watch by her bedside.

Now I am apt to take likes and dislikes when I meet with strangers for the first time. People say it is prejudice, so I suppose it is; but it is a prejudice sometimes for, and sometimes against. And I may mention, in defence of this "prejudice" (which I can no more keep from me than I can keep the moon from shining on my house), that I never yet found the instinct mislead me. There was a governess when I went down to Dr. Goring's this time, a Miss Howard. She was sufficiently good-looking, with a colourless face and a very

subdued tone and manner of speaking, so remarkably gentle as to impart the idea (to me, at least) that it was more assumed than genuine. I took a strange antipathy to this lady when I first saw her; though she appeared willing to be on friendly terms with me, that instinctive power never warned me more strongly against any one. She was about five-and-thirty, but she dressed herself to look younger.

I sat one afternoon in my sister's room, thinking over the observations I had made during my fortnight's stay. I did not like them all. I saw my relatives were living at a high rate of extravagance, which no income—such as theirs—could possibly justify; and I felt sure that that governess was scheming to attract Matthew Goring towards her. *He*, upon the slightest inducement, was ever ready to flirt, and Middlebury knew it. He was a universal favourite, especially with the ladies, gentlemanly, generous, and affable; but he was too fond of talking nonsense, though a kind and affectionate husband.

"What made you think of taking a governess into the house, Mary?" I suddenly asked, letting my work drop in my lap.

"We did it by way of economy," was Mrs. Goring's reply. "The school bills of the two girls were frightfully heavy, and little Jane is coming on now."

"I would have retrenched home expenses, Mary, and have kept the children at school. Your rate of living is enormously extravagant."

"It really is. But we have somehow fallen into this style of housekeeping, and Matthew would not like to retrench. I fear, though he will not acknowledge it to me, that we are living beyond our income. And if I had died during this illness, as was too likely at one period of it, my annuity would have been lost to him."

"Three hundred a-year is a heavy sum to lose in a family," I remarked.

"It is not so much as that," she quickly replied. "The insurance takes up—I forget exactly what, but I think more than a hundred of it."

"What insurance?" I said.

"I insured my life some years ago. Did I never tell you about it? I should think I did."

But she had not. I never heard of it until then.

"It was after a very bad illness, when Jane was born," my sister went on. "They thought that I should lose my life, and so did I think it. And whilst I lay here, getting better, it occurred to me that though I could not continue the annuity to my children I might insure my life with part of it, and thus secure them something. So I insured it for three thousand pounds."

"I am very glad to hear it," I said. "Your husband ought to insure his."

"He has often talked of it, but has never been able to spare the money. We live quite up to our income, Hester; or beyond it."

"Which is the height of imprudence. Suppose you were both—

suppose anything were to happen to you both; there would be absolutely nothing for the children but this three thousand pounds."

"Nothing. Except the furniture and any book debts."

"Six children, and only three thousand pounds!" I mused; "what would become of them?" And I put on my considering cap again, and began to work out an idea which had been haunting me for some days. "Mary," I said after awhile, "suppose I relieve you of one of the girls—Mary, if you can spare her—and take her to London with me, and finish her education free of expense to you; could you not put the other two to school, discharge the governess, and retrench your home expenses? You might retrench them, it seems to me, by one half, and yet live in sufficiently good style."

"I am quite willing to retrench, if you can bring Matthew into the same mind," said Mrs. Goring. "But do you believe it would be more economy to place even two children at school than to keep a governess?"

"Yes, I do," was my decided answer. "If I am to help in this matter at all, Mary, Miss Howard must leave."

I suppose I spoke too pointedly, and so overshot my mark, for Mary looked at me, and a warm flush came into her face.

"Hester! you do not like Miss Howard?"

"She may be a good instructress," I coldly answered, "but, in my opinion, is not altogether a desirable person to retain in your house, the guide and companion of Mary."

"I see what you think," cried my sister, nervously throwing one arm out of bed; "you think she is too familiar with my husband."

"Her manners are certainly not what I approve, Mary."

"But you know that Matthew talks and laughs with everyone," again said Mrs. Goring. "And some young women are so vain as to mistake that for pointed attentions."

"There is not much harm in laughing and talking, when it's confined to that," I growled, feeling angry with Matthew, in my heart, "but his children's governess should be an exception, even from this."

"So I told him," said my sister, "for I did remonstrate with him, one day, about it. In the drawing-room, in my presence, he will pay her more attention than he does me; at the dinner-table the same: once, in coming home late at night, he gave her his arm, and left me to walk with Mary."

"Then she ought not to have taken it," I interrupted. "No rightminded woman would."

"And he seems to talk to her about all sorts of confidential things, often in a whisper: family matters, money matters, which ought to be conversed on only with me. I believe, too, they go out walking together, or, rather, join each other when they get outside the town, which is very bad on Miss Howard's part. But it is not so much the bare fact of all this that I dislike, as ——"

"As what?" I asked, finding Mary hesitate.

"Their manners to each other—though I scarcely know how to express what I mean. They are more considerate, more tender, implying, seemingly, a mutual understanding between themselves and against me. But I must do my husband the justice to say that I believe he never would have thought of all this, but for her first advances to him. *I* saw them, quiet and covert as they were."

"And seeing this, noting this, you can and have kept that woman in your house," I uttered.

"Hester, at times I have been on the very point of discharging her, but then the thought has occurred to me that it may be all nothing, that Matthew's attractive manners may be alone in fault, and that I might be depriving the children of a good instructress (which she certainly is) through an absurd, jealous chimera. When I spoke to Matthew, as I told you, he only laughed at me, and wondered how I could be so very ridiculous. So I dropped the subject, thinking I was, perhaps, ridiculous. But, has the idea struck you, Hester, during your short stay, that there is too good an understanding between her and my husband?"

"Oh, I don't say so far as that," I evasively replied, finding she was more alive to the affair than I had suspected. "Your husband's manners are very free, though they generally mean nothing."

"If I thought there was anything wrong between them," murmured my poor sister—"I do not mean really wrong," she added, interrupting herself; "of course I do not, and could not suspect that; but if I thought there was any positive attachment—that he loved her as he once loved me—I think it would kill me. I have lain here, when I was at the worst, conjuring up a picture—myself gone and forgotten, and *she* the second mother of my children."

"Now, Mary, you are going from one extreme to the other," I remonstrated. But what more I would have said was interrupted by the entrance of the sick-nurse, Mrs. Gill, who came to take my place; and I went downstairs to find my brother-in-law.

I had heard him come in, not long before, and supposed I should find him in the surgery. This surgery had two entrances to it: one leading from the passage, just past the door of the dining-room; the other from the garden at the back of the house. The passage door, by which I was about to enter, was pushed to, but not closed; and as I was going to push it open, I heard the voice of Miss Howard inside. I have, all my life, endeavoured to be honourable in my actions, and I hope I have shunned everything mean; but I thought it my duty to listen then.

"I shall soon become a chemist if you bestow these pains upon me," she was saying, with her soft insinuating accents, false as she was. "And what is this?"

"Oh, that's a very common-place article," responded the merry voice of my brother-in-law, "that's castor oil."

"Oh dear! And this?"

"That's more common still. It is distilled water."

"That little bottle, up there, labelled 'Poison'—it is always kept by itself in that same place, I observe—is it prussic acid?"

"No; but a poison quite as deadly. It is a preparation of strychnia."

"How is it administered?"

"A very minute portion, taken in water, would destroy life. Shall I try it upon yours?"

"*Would* you?" she murmured, with an affectation of submissive tenderness. "I will give you leave to do so if you wish."

"My darling girl," he replied, "you know I would rather try it on my own."

Then came a silence, and I pushed open the door: but may I never speak truth again, if I did not first hear a sound like a kiss. Matthew Goring had her hand in his, and was whispering, and she stood there passively, her hand passively resting there, her countenance and her eyes cast down in a passive attitude of listening. It was evident, that if he was ready to court, she was more than willing to be courted. On his side—I believe so, even now—it was probably only the passing amusement of an idle moment: her conduct wore an aspect far deeper and more reprehensible. I have asked myself, since, whether I was blinded by prejudice, or partiality, in thus judging her to be worse than he, and I cannot bring myself to think so. What business had she out of her own proper place, the school or drawing-room? What business had she to go hunting to his professional apartments after him, with her wicked excuse of wanting to learn chemistry, and her soft voice, subdued to child-like innocence?

I think we all looked rather foolish. The governess drew her hand away, and was the first to break the silence. Which she did with the utmost equanimity.

"Dr. Goring is willing to give me a little insight into the matter of drugs and chemistry," she began, "so I endeavour, in my few leisure moments, to profit by his kindness. A woman, as instructress of youth, cannot know too much: do you think she can, Miss Halliwell?"

"I think a woman may acquire an insight into things entirely unfitted for her, unless she takes care what she is about," I answered, quite angrily. "A knowledge of drugs is not necessary for the instruction of Dr. Goring's daughters."

She said no more to me, but turned and thanked him, in a modest, retiring tone, perfectly charming—to anyone who had not seen her with her hand lying in his, and heard his kiss upon her lips.

"Matthew," I sharply said, as she hurried away, for I felt terribly cross, "all this must be put an end to."

"What must be put an end to?" he inquired, busying himself

with his tubes and chemical glasses, the uses of which he had probably been explaining to her, and whistling with unconcern.

"More things than one," I answered. "This familiarity with your daughters' governess is growing beyond a joke, and ——"

"You surely do not look upon that nonsense as serious?" he interrupted, holding a glass cylinder between his eye and the light to see that it was clean.

"I don't know what you call 'serious'" I indignantly said. "I heard you kiss her."

"Now, Hester," he remonstrated, laughing provokingly all the while, "you have not lived to these years without knowing that we men like to snatch a kiss from a pretty girl under the rose."

"Girl! pretty!" I ejaculated. "*She's* not much of either."

"An attractive woman, then; how you snap one up, Hester. And no disloyalty to our wives, either."

"Your behaviour to Miss Howard, and especially hers to you, is unbecoming in itself and a disgrace to both of you, when carried on in the sight of your wife and daughters," I persisted. "I say nothing of my sister: that she feels this deeply I have discovered to-day, but her retiring, generous disposition induces her to bear in silence what few wives would do. But your daughter! Mary is of an age to see and understand these things. Miss Howard must leave."

"I'm sure I don't care whether she leaves or not," responded the gentleman, with the most apparent unconcern. "But who the deuce is to take care of the children, if you send her away? and Mary ill in bed!"

"That is quite a secondary consideration," I remarked. "Have I your permission to discharge Miss Howard?"

"Well, I don't know. It will look absurdly strange: and so unnecessary. You do her great injustice, Hester, and me too, if you think there's anything wrong. What do you suppose I care for Miss Howard?"

"That you 'care' for her to any extent, I do not fear," I replied, "for when a woman, be she young or getting-on in life, so far forgets herself as to step between man and wife—to endeavour to worm herself clandestinely into his affections, all respect for that woman leaves his mind, and though he may frequent her society for the amusement of the hour, that woman has lost, for him, her greatest charm."

"Egad, you are right there, Hester!" cried Dr. Goring. "When a single woman lapses into a flirtation with a married man, and takes pains to conceal it from the world and the wife, we set her down as a silly fool, who might become something worse if she were tempted."

"Just so. They suit you for amusement, but they are not such as you would place in your home and at your hearth. Many a married man has his 'amusement' in this way, and will have it, I

suppose: but whoever is placed about your wife and children, be it friend, governess, or servant, should be made an exception to your rule of admiration."

"I declare I don't much admire Miss Howard," he laughed. "I think the admiration is mostly on her side."

"I think it is," I answered, dryly. "And that ought to have rendered it the more incumbent on you to discourage it."

Was his indifference put on? I have often wondered, since.

"And now to something else that must be put a stop to," I continued. "I told you, Matthew, there were more things than one."

"To my chemical experiments?" he asked, by way of mocking me.

"To your house extravagance. Mary says you are putting-by nothing out of your income."

"Putting-by! I should think not. The boot's on the other leg."

"Yet you must be in the receipt of eight or nine hundred a year."

"Not much less, besides Mary's money. But look at the expenses, Hester: the servants, the horses, the carriage, the visiting, the children! Matthew's school-bill, for last year, was nearly a hundred and twenty pounds."

"You should not send him to so expensive a one. You might live upon five hundred a year, and put by the rest."

"We 'might' live upon two hundred, I suppose, if we were driven to it. But I must keep up my position in the town, and that cannot be done with less than I spend."

"Yes it can," I earnestly added. "You do not need the carriage, you do not need so many servants, and you do not need to give your extravagant dinner and evening-parties. I am going to run away with Mary, and see what sort of a woman I can turn her out. I will promise you that she shall not be a second Miss Howard. The other two girls you can put to school. If I were mistress here, Matthew, I know I could diminish your expenses one-half, and only lop off superfluities, no comforts, no essentials."

"I wish to goodness you could, then," he said, with a good-humoured but incredulous curl on his lip. "Our bills are confoundedly heavy, and I don't always know where to pick up the money to meet them."

He put on his hat as he spoke, for he had to attend a consultation, but I stopped him to say I should at once discharge Miss Howard.

"Well, if it must be so, it must," was his reply, standing still and looking at me. "But you cannot turn her out of the house as you would a dog—you don't mean that. She must have a month's notice."

"If she insists upon it," I grumbled to myself, as I went to look for the governess. But I felt that any woman, with a spark of delicacy, would prefer to leave at once, under the circumstances.

I entered into no particulars with Miss Howard; I did not allude

to the scene of the surgery, but I said that Dr. and Mrs. Goring had come to the resolution of making a change. They were about to place their daughters at school and had no further occasion for her services, and that she might leave at her earliest convenience.

"I cannot leave without my proper notice," she exclaimed, turning as white as a sheet. "The agreement with Mrs. Goring was a month's notice on either side."

"Then I give it you now," I said; and there I stopped and hesitated. But I thought it better to go on with what I was about to say. "May I suggest, Miss Howard, that for the month you insist upon remaining here, your manners to Dr. Goring may be characterised by more reserve and circumspection?"

"What do you mean?" she retorted.

"It would be superfluous to tell you, since you must well understand my meaning," I replied. "But I may observe, for your future guidance, that if a young woman knew how entirely she forfeits respect when she lapses into undue intimacy with a married man, the respect, not only of the world, *but of him*, we should see less of this selfish and thoughtless conduct than we are compelled now to see. When an unmarried woman suffers herself to lapse into this discreditable intimacy, she stands little chance, let me tell you, of ever becoming a married one."

"That probably is the cause of your being still single," she burst forth, sending a sneer at my advancing years.

"No, thank God," I fervently responded. "My principles and self-esteem have not yet sunk so low as to suffer me to step between man and wife. A woman, a single woman, who can stoop to flirt with a married man, to draw him to her side, regardless of the outrage to the feelings of his wife, is guilty of as great a crime as are those poor fallen creatures who set themselves out to lead men into guilt. And this opinion is Dr. Goring's as well as mine. Never you descend again to play yourself off upon a married man, Miss Howard, he will not thank you for it long."

She looked round the room with her livid face, livid with anger. I thought she was looking for something to throw at me, and to avoid that, and any further unpleasantness, I quitted the room, reminding her that as that was the 1st of July, the day of her departure would be the 1st of August.

That same evening, after tea, I was sitting with Mrs. Goring, when my eldest niece came into the chamber.

"Mamma," she said, "Mrs. Stone and Emily have sent for me in, and to take my music. May I go?"

"Yes if you like, Mary," replied my sister. "Where's Frances?"

"I think she is in the nursery, dressing Jane's doll."

"Then where's Miss Howard?"

"I don't know, mamma," was Mary's answer. "I saw her, after tea, in the garden with papa."

That was enough for me, and downstairs I went. "There shall be no private and confidential interviews if I can help it," quoth I to myself. I went by way of the surgery: not because I wanted to steal into the garden by the more private way, but because I thought they might be at that excuse of their chemicals again. The surgery was empty. I thought the garden was, at first, but as I stood in the corner, just outside the little surgery door, I heard the sound of subdued voices in the summer-house. So I went up the narrow side-path, against the apricot wall, my feet almost treading on the straggling strawberry plants. And Miss Frances, by the way, was not in the nursery. I heard her laughing with the servants in the kitchen.

They did not see me come up: the door of the summer-house faced the other side-wall of the garden. The first words I was near enough to hear were from her.

"What right has she to come down and make these changes, and interfere in your household? You must have the temper of an angel to put up with it."

"The truth is, my dear" (it was his voice now), "that, as I hinted to you, I am drained dry and ready to catch at straws. Mrs. Goring has no idea that my embarrassments are serious: but if we go on at our present rate of living, we shan't long go on at all. If we can retrench expenses, and so patch up matters, exposure may be avoided. Miss Halliwell's offer of taking Mary is a great help, now that the most expensive period of her education is coming on: but she does this only on condition that the others shall be put to school."

"She has taken a dislike to me," murmured the lady, in a sweetly plaintive tone. "Old maid's prejudices are unfathomable."

This was good from her, with her five-and-thirty years! I don't know what answer Matthew made. I heard none.

"You are a little in debt?" she went on to ask.

"Jolly well deep in it," was his reply. "It would take many hundreds to set me free."

"Mrs. Goring has property, I have heard. Can you not make it available?"

"Mrs. Goring's money is an annuity, and it dies with her."

"All of it?"

"All. But her life is insured for three thousand pounds."

"What a help that would be to you! It would free you, and doubly free you. What a good thing!"

"Why, you speak," laughed Matthew, "as if it were something coming to me to-morrow. My ever having it is the most remote contingency in the world. She may outlive me. And, if not, Mrs. Goring intends that money to go to the children, not to pay off my extravagances."

There is always a little corner of thankfulness in my heart when I think of that sentence, and of Matthew's cheery, hearty expression when he gave utterance to it. It seems to repeat over to me

that he was not the guilty man, the man with murder on his soul, that some have since deemed him.

"Mrs. Goring's life seems a precarious one," she went on to say: "she is always ailing. I am sure if the three thousand pounds you speak of should drop in, it would be your duty to make use of it. Your ease and comfort should be paramount to every other consideration."

I fear a feeling of positive hatred rose in my heart when I heard her thus make light of the life of my dear sister and his wife. I gave a great cough to let them know I was there, and walked round to the front of the arbour.

She came out then, but not before I saw him draw his arm from round her waist, and she went towards the house.

"Where is Miss Frances?" I said to her.

"With her sister," replied Miss Howard.

"She is in the kitchen with the servants," I retorted. "And I apprehend Mrs. Goring would not approve of her making them her companions."

I said no more. If I had, I might have said too much; and I resolutely bit my lip to impose self-silence. My gentleman had sauntered off, towards the vegetables.

I did not see much, after that, during my stay. To be sure, I was out a good deal then, calling on old friends, and sometimes to spend the evening, so that those two, if they wished, may have found opportunities of being together without my knowing it. My sister was improving in health, and sat up for several hours each day, but she did not yet leave her room.

CHAPTER XXIV.

"DIED FROM POISON."

Our own pupils were coming back to us the 10th of July: for we have never followed the bad custom of giving six or seven weeks' holiday: and on the 7th I returned home, there being several household matters I wished to arrange before they came. I took Frances with me—Mrs. Goring, in her weak, nervous state, seemed unwilling to part with Mary, who could now make herself useful in many ways—and quitted Middlebury early in the morning, reaching London and home the same evening.

I was up betimes the next day: I am always an early riser: but we breakfasted later than usual, for at eight o'clock Frances was still sleeping. We would not begin without her, and yet did not like to disturb her, for she was tired, poor child, with her journey, so that it was past nine when we sat down to breakfast.

I was pouring out the second cups of tea, when the postman's knock was heard at the door, and our cook—the other servants

being at that hour engaged in their upstairs duties—came in with a letter.

"Twopence, ma'am," said cook.

"Twopence!" I answered, diving into my pocket, "who can have sent a letter unpaid?"

"It is to ask for a prospectus, no doubt," observed Lucy, who had taken the letter, while I paid cook. "But it has the Middlebury postmark!"

"It is Mary's writing, I am sure, Aunt Hester," observed the little girl; "and what a great sprawling seal she has put! She has been getting at papa's wax, too, for it is black."

I took the letter out of Lucy's hand, and a sort of unpleasant tremor came over me when I gazed on the black seal. Mary Goring, in her little notes to her young friends, was so fond of displaying her blue, scented wax. Why had she now used black?

I opened the letter: it was blotted, as if written and folded in haste, and but few words were in it. I ran my eye hastily over them, and screamed out. Had my life depended on my not screaming, I could not have helped myself, the shock was so terrible; though I have great command over my feelings in general: how else should I be fitted to train the young?

"Oh come back to us, my dear Aunt Hester! Mamma is dead. And they say she is poisoned. Papa is crying dreadfully. Come directly. "Your affectionate niece,

"Mary Goring."

Now were not those words enough to make me scream?

I went at once. I sent cook out for a cab, taking off my gingham dress and putting on my black silk one while she was gone, and my shawl and bonnet; and when she came back in it I was ready, and drove away to the Paddington Railway Station. I left the letter with Lucy, but we did not tell Frances. I only said to her that her mamma was not so well. Girls of twelve are easily satisfied.

I could not get off till the twelve o'clock train, and it was night when the Middlebury omnibus—which had to take me the concluding miles of my journey—reached Middlebury. I trust I shall never again have to pass such a day as that. My suspense and anxiety were hard to bear. Sometimes I felt as if the railway train did not go quickly enough, and that I must rise from my seat and try to fly over the intervening distance; at others, it seemed as if nothing so horrible could have happened, and that Mary's letter must have been a dream. A gentleman in the same carriage offered me the *Times* to read. I took it, and held it before my eyes; but the letters seemed to swim, and when I did get to read a sentence, I could not understand it. So I thanked him, and put it down again.

I knocked when I reached my brother-in-law's; very softly, as became a house where death was. Susan opened the door, the

housemaid: a neat, tidy girl. "Oh, ma'am! Oh, ma'am!" she exclaimed, putting up her hands when she saw me. "But I am glad you are come."

"Is your mistress—alive?" I asked. I don't know why I should have said that; for surely no hope could have lurked within me, after the letter.

"Dear ma'am," she uttered, bursting into tears, "alive! she died yesterday afternoon. Master's in there," she added, gently opening the door of the dining-room.

He was in there alone, sitting moodily by the window, and there was no light in the room, saving what came from the street gas-lamp outside, through the muslin curtains and the white blind. Even in that uncertain light I could see the traces of suffering—his pale face, his disordered hair and his swollen eyes.

"Oh, Hester, Hester!" he exclaimed, coming forward and taking both my hands, "this is dreadful."

I cannot remember all that passed. I believe I asked to see her, I asked particulars about her death and I wept with him.

It was already known, beyond doubt, that the cause of her death was poison. She had dined at one o'clock and had lain down on the bed after it to sleep, as was usual since her illness: some toast-and-water stood at the bed-side; and when she awoke thirsty, and asked for drink, the nurse gave her this. She drank it, complained of its bitter taste, fell into convulsive pains and soon after died.

"Could anything have been put into the toast-and-water?" I exclaimed.

"So it would appear," he answered, "but it is a great mystery."

"Then, Matthew Goring," I rejoined, peering steadily at him, "WHO can have put it in?"

"I know not," he answered, earnestly. "As the Lord liveth and looketh down upon me, Hester, I am as ignorant and innocent of this business as you are."

"Where was Miss Howard at the time?"

"Hester," he gravely said, "you are prejudiced against Miss Howard, but for the love of justice do not carry it so far as to cast this suspicion upon her. A gentlewoman of character, of refined feeling; and you would point to her as being guilty of a crime, black as night!"

"It is you who are blindly prejudiced in her favour," I replied to him. "I do think, if she were proved guilty of this, *you* would not believe it."

"I should not," was Matthew's avowal. "Not from any reason you hint at, but because I feel her to be utterly incapable of even thinking of such a crime, much less committing it. But pray do not continue to suspect me of any undue preference for her, Hester. If, as you once hinted, she caused uneasiness to my dear wife, I wish, to my soul, she had never come inside the house."

"Ay, that's always the case—repentance when it is too late. Many

a man would be more careful not to give his wife cause for anxiety, if he thought he was soon to lose her." I could not help saying that: it was in my thoughts, so out it came.

I did suspect Miss Howard: and many a time, since, have I prayed to be forgiven if I suspected her wrongly: but, alas! I suspect her still. In Dr. Goring's present mood, it was of no use harping upon it. I went upstairs with him, into his chamber. My ill-fated sister was lying there, on the bed where I had left her the previous morning, getting well; and now she was cold and lifeless.

"Will there be an inquest," I asked, when I could check my tears.

"It will be held to-morrow," he replied.

"She does not look as though she had died from poison," I said, gazing on her calm, pale features. "What poison was it?"

"Strychnia. The traces have been detected in her, and also in the toast-and-water remaining in the glass."

"Matthew," I said, looking at him, "you pointed that very poison out to Miss Howard the other day, in your surgery. I was halting at the door to come in, and heard what you said."

"True She was asking me the names of various articles, and that amongst the rest. I remember it."

"Could the poison which has destroyed *her* have come from that bottle?"

"Hester, I know no more than you where the poison came from," he replied, his tones full of mourning and anguish; "I wish I did know. The phial still stands in the same place in the surgery, and appears not to have been touched."

"What name is it that you call it?"

"It was a preparation of strychnia."

"That must be a new poison. I never heard of it."

"It is one but little known, excepting to medical men."

The sick-nurse, Mrs. Gill, gave me the most explicit account of the awful business. As I was leaving the death chamber with Dr. Goring, she was passing, and I turned back into it with her. He went downstairs. She was a good old soul, but very unsuspicious.

"My poor missis had dined sumptuously, ma'am, for her appetite was a-coming back to her, as you know. The wing and breast of a roast fowl, and a bit of bacon, and parsley-and-butter, and some porter. Dr. Goring ran up, when he had done carving for them in the parlour, with a decanter of port wine in his hand. 'Some glasses, Mrs. Gill,' he said and I brought 'em to him, and he poured out the wine. My missis drank one glass, and he drank two: he wanted her to have another, and said it wouldn't hurt her, but she said, No, not as she had taken the porter. So he left the decanter on the mantel-piece, and told me to be sure and give her a glass about seven in the evening, if he was not in, himself. Then she laid down on the bed for her afternoon's sleep, and he leaned over her and gave her a kiss—for, if he did—ahem!—if he did admire other faces, he

was a most tender man to his wife—and he went downstairs. I followed him, to go to my dinner, only stopping to pour out a glass of toast-and-water, and put it by my missis, as I always did in the afternoon. Sometimes she would drink it all, and sometimes she'd not drink any of it, but she liked it to be there. Well, ma'am, I went down, shutting the bedroom door after me, to keep out the noise. I didn't hurry over my dinner, and that's the truth, for I thought my missis would be asleep and wouldn't want me, and I know it must have been a-getting on for three when I got back upstairs. The bedroom door was not closed then, only pushed to, so I knew somebody had been in the room: in my own mind, I supposed it was Miss Mary. I stole in, and looked at my missis: she was sleeping sweetly—here, ma'am, on her own side of the bed. Well I went and stood for a minute at the window, and there I saw Mrs. Cox's carriage come a-rattling down the street, with her and Miss in it. It stopped at our door, and their great oaf of a footboy got down, and gave such a peal upon the knocker as shook the house. My missis started up in a fright. 'What's that noise, nurse?' she called out; 'any of the children hurt?' 'Bless you, no, ma'am,' says I, 'it's that dratted knocker. I wish folks wouldn't come a-noising and calling here, when people's asleep as wants sleep.' And for nothing, it weren't but to leave a card, for the carriage and Mrs. and Miss druv off again. 'Try and doze a bit more, ma'am,' I said. 'I don't know,' said my missis, 'I think I am thoroughly aroused. Give me some toast-and-water, nurse, I am thirsty.' 'That's the bacon, ma'am,' I said, and handed her the glass of toast-and-water, which stood ready on the little table by the bedside where I had put it. She drank it nearly all. 'It's as bitter as gall, Mrs. Gill,' she exclaimed; 'what have you done to it?' 'Bitter?' I said, 'why I made it with my own two sinful hands this morning, and I'm sure the bread weren't burnt. It was not bitter before dinner.' With that I turned to the jug, which stood atop of the drawers, and poured a drop into one of the wineglasses, after rinsing the drain of port wine out, and tasted it. And I felt then that missis's mouth must be out of taste, for it was not bitter at all, but sweet, fresh toast-and-water. I did not say so, for it ain't my place, ma'am, to contradict my ladies' fancies, and they weak and ill, but was a-going to wash out the two wineglasses, when I saw missis a-gasping on the bed. I rang the bell furiously, a deal longer and fiercer than that blundering footboy had pealed upon the knocker, and Dr. Goring, who was a-smoking in the arbour——"

"Smoking where?" I asked.

"In the arbour, ma'am, the summer-house in the garden. He heard the ringing and came flying up. Susan came at the same time, and Miss Mary came. Oh, ma'am, I can hardly tell you what happened next: my missis was in dreadful agony, and the room was full of confusion, servants and children crowding out and in. Dr. Goring

was the first to call out that she must have been poisoned, and the other doctors, when they came, said the same. They could not save her, and before five she was gone. Poor Miss Mary took on the least, to look at, but she felt it, I saw, more than any of them, except her father. It was me as whispered her to send for you, and she wrote a line, standing up, and Susan tore off with it, without a bonnet, and without a stamp, that she might save the post. I thought it right that you should be here, ma'am."

"Quite right," I said. "But now, Nurse Gill, answer me a serious question. How, and when, could the poison have been administered to Mrs. Goring?"

"When she drank the toast-and-water, ma'am," was the old woman's unhesitating reply. "I put my finger into the little that was left in the glass and tasted it, and sure enough it was as bitter as wormwood. Dr. Goring tasted it also after me, and told me to tie a bladder over it, and lock it up in my cupboard till the doctors came: he said there was poison in it. The doctors have got it now; they tasted it when I gave it to them, and they called the poison by a hard name, and Dr. Goring said he had got some of the same sort of poison in his surgery."

"Nurse, how could the poison have got into the glass?"

"Why, ma'am, it couldn't have got there of its own accord, so it must have been put in; but if you hung me I never could guess who by. Who in this house would do such a thing? None of us. If we could only find out who had been in the room!"

"Where was Dr. Goring?"

"Smoking in the arbour, ma'am, as I told you. When I followed him downstairs, as I was a-going to my dinner, I saw him stroll up the garden, and go into it, with his case of cigars and a newspaper. He was a-lighting a cigar as he went."

"Was he alone?"

"Quite alone, ma'am. The day afore, the two young gentlemen was with him, but they was both out yesterday. Master Goring had went spending the day in the country at the Halliwells', and young Alfred had went to school, for I see him from this window a-racing off to it, just as his papa came up with the wine."

"Could Dr. Goring have come in from the garden without being seen? Of course, Nurse Gill, you will not think I suspect him, in thus questioning," I proceeded, "but by throwing all possible light upon the movements of the house at that moment, we may obtain some clue to the real criminal."

"In course, ma'am," acquiesced the nurse, "nobody would be so wicked or so silly as to doubt Dr. Goring. A better husband never lived, barring a little bit of joking and talking that he is fond of having with the ladies—and most men are alike for that, so far as I see. He could not have come in without our seeing him, for our dinner-table was close to the window, and we had full view of the

garden. Unless," added the nurse slowly, as if debating the point with herself, "he had come down the little path leading to the surgery; but then some of us must have seen him come out of the arbour and cross to it. No, ma'am, he could not have come out at all."

"But you are not sure?" I urged.

"I would not swear it, but I'm morally sure," was her reply. "Rely upon it, ma'am, he never stirred out of that summer-house till I rang the bell and brought him rushing upstairs."

"Then let us go on again," I said. "Assuming that it could not be Dr. Goring or the servants ——,"

"I'll be upon my oath, ma'am, if necessary," interrupted the nurse, "that not a servant left the kitchen."

"The servants or the children," I proceeded, as if she had not broken the thread of my sentence, "there is no one else in the house —but Miss Howard."

"Dear, ma'am," uttered Nurse Gill, "you'd never go to suspect her! A handsome young lady—though not over young, maybe, for the matter of that—clever, edicated, plays and sings like a cherrybim, and with her mild, quiet voice—I'd as soon think it was myself as her."

"I was only asking about the position of those in the house, if you remember, not talking of suspicion, nurse. Do you know where Miss Howard was whilst you were at dinner?"

"She was in the dining-room all the while, as I believe, and she never came out of it. Miss Mary can tell you the same, ma'am, if you'll please to have her called in."

"Will she be afraid to come in here?"

"Not she, ma'am. She has been in ten times, poor thing, a-sobbing over her mamma. She is either in the nursery or with Miss Howard, I suppose. I'll go and find her."

Mary came in. When her surprise—for Susan had not told her of my arrival—and her first burst of tears were over, I began to question her.

"Mary," I said, "I am trying to ascertain in what part of the house you all were yesterday, during Mrs. Gill's absence at dinner. Your papa was in the garden; the servants were in the kitchen; the boys were out; and you and little Jane, nurse says, were in the nursery."

"Yes, aunt, we were. Miss Howard had been in a passion with Jane at the morning's lessons, and she ordered her into the nursery, and sent her a piece of dry bread for dinner. I thought it was a shame, for it was only Miss Howard's temper that was in fault—but it has been very bad since she knew she must leave—and when papa rose from the dinner-table to go to mamma's room, Alfred ran off to school, and I went up in the nursery to take Jane some cherries, leaving Miss Howard in the dining-room."

"Did you see nothing of Miss Howard, after that, before the alarm?"

"Oh, yes. I went downstairs almost directly for some more cherries. She was still in the dining-room, netting, and I remember she complained of Alfred, and said he was a careless boy and had gone to school without washing his hands. I then went back to the nursery, and stayed there till nurse and baby came up from dinner."

"The nursemaid, she means, ma'am," interrupted Nurse Gill. "She left the kitchen as I did, and we both came up the stairs together. Baby—as they still call little John—had dropped asleep over his dinner, and she was a-going to lay him down. I say he sleeps too much for a child of three years old."

"And when the nursemaid went up, you went down," I remarked to Mary. "Where was Miss Howard then?"

"Still netting in the dining-room, Aunt Hester, and she looked as if she had not stirred from her seat. Soon afterwards mamma's bell rang violently."

"I won't say as she had not stirred from her seat, for I don't know nothing about that," broke in Mrs. Gill, "but I will say as she had not left the room, for, if she had, we must have heard her in the kitchen."

"Did you hear no one go up or down stairs?" I enquired.

"Not a soul," replied the woman, "and we had the kitchen door open. The house seemed as still as it is at this moment. If this dreadful thing had not happened, I could have been upon my oath that nobody had been near the stairs."

"You heard Miss Mary, when she came down for the cherries?"

"Of course, ma'am, we heard her: that was just as we were beginning dinner. We heard her come out of the nursery, run down the stairs, go into the dining-room, stop there a minute, run up again and shut the nursery door. You shut it with a bang, Miss Mary, and I said to the servants that missis had not had time to get to sleep, or it might have woke her."

"Still—talking, as you all no doubt were, over your dinner, Mrs. Gill—I think you could not have heard quiet footsteps on the stairs. And who ever did this deed, did not, you may be sure, go about it with noisy ones."

"Ma'am, we was unusually still. The cook—though, of course, you have not heard of it—had just had bad news. Her brother was at his mason's work atop of a house, and the ladder fell with him, and it was feared both his legs was broke. They had been to tell her of it, and she was as low as could be, though she weren't a-crying, and we was all sorry for her, and I can assure you we eat our dinners in silence, and there was hardly a word spoke. Sometimes there's enough talking and laughing going on with 'em, but there wasn't yesterday. I was just a-going to tell the news to my poor missis, when she was took."

"You heard nothing, Mary?" I said to her.

"Nothing at all, Aunt Hester. And we were quiet also in the nursery. Jane was eating the cherries and I was reading."

"You see, ma'am, it's a complete mystery," observed Nurse Gill.

It did indeed seem so, and I could not fathom it. I took an opportunity of asking Dr. Goring whether he had come in from the arbour or not, after going there.

"I never left it," he replied. "I had my cigars, and had stretched myself at ease on the bench, reading the county paper. The violent ringing of Mary's bell aroused me, and I ran in."

Oh yes, yes, I am sure he spoke the truth. *I* did not suspect Dr. Goring, for to commit a cruelty or a crime was foreign to Matthew's nature.

The coroner's inquest was held, but it failed to throw any light upon the mystery. Amongst the witnesses examined was Miss Howard. She deposed that she had been in the dining-room the whole of the time the nurse was at dinner, shut in there, and that she had heard nothing. Suspicion did not fall upon her, except in my own heart, and I could not openly accuse her. There were no proofs whatever. The verdict returned was, "Died from poison: but by whom administered there is no evidence to show."

On the day but one afterwards my dear sister was buried. The churchyard was so crowded with spectators that the clergyman could scarcely push his way through them, as he walked at the head of the coffin: and at the conclusion of the service, as the mourners were leaving the grave, a hiss arose from the crowd—they were hissing Dr. Goring. He, his sons, Matthew and Alfred, and Mr. Halliwell (Tom Halliwell, as we once called him, but his father was dead now—ah! Mary had better have had Tom, than have come to this dreadful ending) were the chief mourners, but several friends had followed. Matthew had gone direct to school from Mr. Halliwell's with a son of his, the very evening of his mother's death, but he was sent for to attend the funeral. He was a handsome, merry boy of fourteen, very like his father. Alfred was ten. I shall never forget poor Dr. Goring when he came in from the funeral. The lads went upstairs, but he came into the darkened dining-room where I was, and throwing his hat with its long crape streamers on a chair, sat down and sobbed as if his heart would break. I was not crying then, myself: I think I had cried so much that my eyes, for the moment, were drained dry, and I went up to him and begged him to be composed. "Hester," he sobbed; "Hester, they have been hissing me at Mary's grave. As you stand there, it is truth."

"Who has hissed you?" I asked.

"The mob in the churchyard. They whispered 'Murderer.' God knows I have not deserved it. If my dear wife was murdered, it was not by me. I would have given my life to prolong hers."

I thought it best not to talk just then, and he grew composed, after a while, though, I must say, his face was full of suffering and

sorrow; but at night, when the candles were lighted and we were alone again, the children being in bed, I inquired what he meant to do.

"In what way?" he asked.

"About your children, and your housekeeping matters. Who is to conduct your house?"

"Oh, Hester, I cannot think of these things. They must take their chance. Unless you can put them on some sort of footing before you go back again."

I tried to do so. I saw Miss Howard out of the house (with a true thanksgiving) and I established Mary as housekeeper. Though only fifteen, she was so sensible and steady a girl that I had no fear of leaving her as such; and she was to go as morning pupil to Miss Sherwood's school, till her education was completed. Matthew and Alfred were placed, together, at a less expensive establishment than the one Matthew had hitherto been in, and the little fellow, John, I consigned to Susan, who undertook the charge of him. I would have taken Jane back with me, but Matthew said he could not be deprived of wife and children at once. Then I induced Matthew to lay down the carriage, and discharge the coachman and two of the maids, and make a reduction in many other ways. Altogether, I did what I could, and left for home, with many words of advice to Mary, an injunction to her to write to me weekly, and a promise to go down at Christmas.

I have said that I think none, save myself, suspected Miss Howard: certainly not any of the immediate family: but there were whispers in the town as to Dr. Goring, though I am sure he did not merit them. People hinted at the windfall that insurance money was to him, and his practice, for the moment, fell off considerably. None knew, I daresay none ever will know, the truth of this mysterious crime; it happened in silence and secrecy, and so it remains buried. Sometimes, in my dreams, I see Miss Howard standing, barefooted, by a bed-side, on which lies a happy wife, sleeping calmly. I see her leaning over a small table, with a phial in her hand, and I see her drop something from it into a glass which stands there. Then I see her steal away with breathless caution, and glide down the stairs in silence, till she comes to a room where many bottles and jars, on shelves, and chemical tubes, lie about, and I see her mount a chair softly, and put that phial into its place in a corner, and then she creeps back again to a large sitting-room close by, closes the door with cat-like stillness, thrusts her feet into her shoes, sits down and takes up some work. And I have noted the form of Dr. Goring hovering near, and sometimes he seems to look on approvingly through all; then I notice that he is stone-blind, and cannot see as I do. And I awake, shivering and comfortless, and cry out with horror and pain, as I did that fearful morning when I received Mary Goring's letter, and then I remember that it is all a dream and that I am very foolish.

But I know one thing: and I will speak out my sentiments, and people may call me an old maid for them if they will. If I had the handling of these women-serpents, these single females, who come envying and trying to destroy the wedded happiness which they have never been asked to share, I would cause them to be paraded through the town on a market day, in a white garment, according to the former custom of doing penance, and then have them privately whipped. For when they insinuate their treacherous arts between man and wife, they are deliberately flying in the face of a divine command: "THOSE WHOM GOD HATH JOINED TOGETHER, LET NOT MAN PUT ASUNDER."

CHAPTER XXV.

A SECRET MARRIAGE.

AUNT COPP had once prophesied that Hester's life would be full of business and care, and it really seemed like it. They had but just got Captain Copp's wedding over, when a letter arrived from Mr. Halliwell at Chelson, saying that his wife (who had long been in a poor state of health) was worse than usual, and begging Hester to go there.

"What is to be done, Lucy?"

"I do not see how you can refuse to go," was Lucy's reply. "Poor Alfred! what trouble and worry he has! And the very last man formed by nature for a life of care."

"Don't say that, Lucy," remonstrated Hester; "to us he seemed so, but, rely upon it, the back is always fitted to the burden. It may be that had Alfred been more favourably circumstanced, he would have led a life of dreamy, useless indolence—have kept a curate to do the work, and shuffle off action and responsibility from himself."

Hester wrote an answer, and started for Chelson on the following Monday. The rail conveyed her thither in a few hours, and she got out on to the platform. She was looking out for her trunk when a boy who appeared to be one of the employed, and was busy with the porters, ran up to her:

"If you please, are you Aunt Hester?"

She was taken by surprise. Could it be that one of her brother's boys was working at the railway station? "Who are you?" she asked.

"I am Sam, Aunt Hester. Next to Tom. Shall I see to your luggage?"

"Yes, my dear. I will walk on."

"The omnibus will go round the town directly. Papa told me to put you in it."

But Hester preferred to walk, Sam calling after her to ask if she knew her way. She remembered it quite well, reached the house, and knocked. The door was opened by a flaunty-looking servant.

with open sleeves and a piece of round white lace stuck on the back of her head. Hester wondered if she called it a cap.

"Is Mr. Halliwell at home?"

"Mr. Halliwell!" was the answer. "What, the parson?"

"Yes. The Reverend Mr. Halliwell. Is he at home?"

"He don't live here, mum. He lives at the Vicarage."

"At the Vicarage!" Hester repeated in her surprise.

"Yes, he do," was the girl's answer. "He have moved into it, out of here, this two years."

Hester turned towards the Vicarage, with an oppressed feeling at her heart. To think that they should have gone back to that terrible place, where, as Mabel had once observed to her, the wet ran down the walls and the odours made her ill. Her brother was standing at the churchyard steps. Strangely altered; bowed, and grey and broken! in appearance an old man, though not yet fifty.

"Are you walking, Hester?" he exclaimed. "I told Samuel to put you into the omnibus."

"My legs were cramped with the journey," she replied, as he took her hand. "How is Mabel?"

"Better to-day. It is the thought of your coming. I fear, Hester, we shall lose her."

"Alfred," she exclaimed, almost passionately, "what brings you back, living at this unwholesome place?"

"There was no help for it," he sadly said. "Expenses were so heavy upon me, I was unable to pay rent."

Unconsciously Hester had halted, leaning with her elbow on the low gate of the churchyard. Her heart was full. "I did not know Samuel," she observed.

"I dare say not. He was a little chap in petticoats, I suppose, when you were last here."

"I mean I never should have looked out for him as one of the railway servants. I do not speak in any spirit of false pride, Alfred, but it vexed me to see him there, the son of a clergyman."

"I cannot do better," replied Mr. Halliwell. "Perhaps in time something may turn up. I strove to keep my boys to occupations only fitted for gentlemen. I was in hopes, great hopes, of sending George to college; in a subordinate capacity of course, what we call a servitor; and I kept him at home to his reading and his classics. But one cannot confine boys of seventeen in-doors, and always have an eye over them. I am obliged to be out much, and it seems George used to get out. He made acquaintance with expensive companions, they led him into debt and it nearly ruined me."

"Debt which you had to pay?" asked Hester.

"Yes. It was almost sixty pounds. I thought every stick and stone we had must have been sold. But they gave me time, and are giving it me still."

"And where's George now?"

"That's the worst part of the business. It is that," he added, lowering his voice, "which has brought down his mother. He had as good a heart, poor fellow, as ever breathed, and when he saw the embarrassment his imprudent thoughtlessness caused, he started off, saying he would no longer be a source of grief to us, and went to sea."

"To what part of the world? When did you hear from him?" reiterated Hester.

"Never since," he whispered, turning away his face, so that Hester could not see it.

"Why, can that be Sam! wheeling down my luggage himself!" uttered Hester.

Mr. Halliwell looked towards the advancing truck. "Yes, it is Samuel," he quietly said, not seeming to feel the affair in the least.

"Samuel, how could you think of doing such a thing!" Hester exclaimed when he came up. "I told you to let the omnibus bring my boxes."

"The omnibus would have charged you a shilling, Aunt Hester," returned the boy, looking at her with a good-humoured smile on his bright face: "sixpence for the trunk, though it is small, and sixpence for the bandbox. It has not hurt me."

"Well, Sam, as you have done it, and it can't be helped, there's the shilling for you."

"Oh no, indeed, Aunt Hester, I did not do it to get the shilling for myself. That would be cheating the Company; but, of course, as you are my aunt, I could bring them free if I liked. I will not take it, thank you."

"Very well," said Hester, admiring the lad in her heart. "If young porters are too proud to accept shillings, I cannot help it."

"Better for him to be at this honest employment, though he is the descendant of a race of gentlemen, if it keeps him out of mischief, than go wrong through idleness, as George did," whispered Mr. Halliwell to his sister.

"Yes, yes, Alfred, it is better. What is Tom doing?"

"Thomas is in his Uncle Zink's office."

"Articled?"

"Only as a clerk," sighed Mr. Halliwell. "He gets a trifle a-week. We cannot place boys out as gentlemen, Hester, without premium, nowadays, and I have not got it to pay."

At the door of the Vicarage stood Emma and Annie, both lady-like girls, and one of them, Emma, extremely pretty. Though only attired in cheap alpaca dresses, they looked like the daughters of a gentleman. Archibald, the youngest child, was peeping out of the parlour.

"Now, guess which is which," said Mr. Halliwell.

Hester looked at the smiling, blushing countenances of the two young ladies, and guessed wrongly. "That is Annie," she said,

pointing to the pretty one, with the rich colour and merry eyes. Mr. Halliwell laughed.

"That is Emma. Lead your aunt upstairs to your mamma, children."

Hester followed them to Mrs. Halliwell's bed-chamber, the very room from which she had stolen the ornamental bands that Sacrament Sunday so long ago, and the occurrence came forcibly to her mind as she crossed the threshold and saw the dressing-table whence she had taken them. The room looked very nice, the curtains, sheets and dressing-cloths snowy white. Mrs. Halliwell was sitting up in bed, sewing, her thin face as white as the linen.

"Mamma, here is Aunt Hester."

The pink hectic flushed into her face then, and her trembling hands let fall the work. Hester leaned over the bed and kissed her. "You look poorly, Mabel," she said, "but I have come to cure you."

"You have come to see me die," she whispered; and there was a resigned expression in her face which Hester had never before seen in it.

Hester took off her shawl and bonnet and sat down by her, and the two girls left the room, to get tea ready, by their mother's orders.

"How have you managed to get into this weak state?" enquired Hester.

Mrs. Halliwell did not answer immediately, but lay with her handkerchief pressed to her face; Hester thought to hide the tears.

"It has come on by degrees," she said: "I have had *so much* to bear. But I am not grumbling as I used to do," she hastily added, as an earnest, happy expression flitted over her countenance. "Oh Hester! how I could have gone on for all those years without LIGHT coming to me, I cannot tell. Do you remember how I would abuse and despise Alfred for that welcoming of trouble, that resigned, *trusting* spirit of his?"

Hester nodded.

"But it came to me also in God's own good time. I see things clearly now; I did not then. Trials, troubles as we call them, are sent to us in mercy, and, accordingly as they are received, they are to us miseries or blessings. Alfred, in his submissive, trustful spirit, made them the former; *I* murmured and rebelled. But, as I say, light has come to me; and I can look back now on my life of care, and truthfully say I would not change its remembrance for that of an easier one."

"Then you are happy, Mabel?"

"Quite happy," she answered, with a movement of the hands which spoke perfect content. "When the conviction first stole upon me that I was declining, I could not have said so, on account of my children. For myself I had no regrets, for I had found my Saviour; but oh! to leave my children! To feel that I was going to be taken

to a heavenly home, and that they—perhaps one; perhaps two; more; how could I tell? might never come to it! that no mother would henceforth be with them, to be their guide, and whisper a warning, a word in season, or to pray for them! and then a remorse came to me: that when they were young I might have done so much more than I did do, to turn their hearts and hopes heavenward. But all that anguish has passed—save for one of them—and I am content to leave them in the hands of HIM who has drawn me to Him, and will, I surely trust, in due course, draw them also."

"How long have you been ill?" enquired Hester.

"It is a long, long time since I felt strong, but I have been palpably declining nearly two years. There is not much the matter with me, even now, beyond want of strength."

"Have you a good appetite?"

"Not now, and it has been very dainty throughout. Delicacies, niceties, I could have eaten; indeed I used to crave for them with an intense longing; fowl, and tender cuts out of a large joint of meat, and strong beer, and similar things. But of course we could not procure them, and our common food I was unable to eat. I expect that has been the chief cause of my decline, a want of proper nourishment. Since it has been known that I am seriously ill, every one is very kind, sending me jellies and wine and tempting bits from their own table, but the craving for them is gone and they do me no good. Did Alfred tell you about George?"

"Yes."

"Oh, if I could but see him! if I could but know where he is! if I could but have him with me for an hour, here, by my bedside, and charge him to struggle through life, bearing one end in view—to come to me *up there*—it seems that I could die in peace!"

She had pointed her hand to the sky as she spoke, and Hester could not trust her voice to speak just then.

"Two years," she continued, "two whole years and never to have heard of him! whether he is dead or alive, whether he is in distress; in slavery; whether he is with companions that will lead him into all evil! Oh Hester! and he was my first-born, my dearest child."

"He is in God's hands," whispered Hester. "And, Mabel, so are your cares."

"I know it, I know it. But for that knowledge I scarcely think I could bear the care for him which presses on me. Oh, George! my boy, my boy! I often wish, Hester, he had gone before me, a child, as poor little David did."

"And so old Betty is dead," observed Hester, by way of diverting Mabel's thoughts.

"Betty is dead. There lies another of my regrets: I never appreciated her as I ought. She had so hard a life here, yet I made little effort to smooth things for her, but too often found fault and grumbled. She stopped with us, good faithful creature, as long as

she could stop, faring hard and never asking for her wages. She is better off now. Hester, tell me all the particulars about your ill-fated sister, Mrs. Goring. Alfred and I cannot understand her death yet."

"I will tell you to-morrow, Mabel, not this evening. It is a long tale. Were you not surprised at Amy's marriage?"

Mrs. Halliwell could not help smiling. "Indeed we were surprised at both of them. At him for choosing Amy, so meek and retiring, and at her for putting up with a husband who had a wooden leg. I do not see why they should not be very happy. The worst is Mrs. Copp's displeasure. Do you think she will ever be reconciled?"

"She is reconciled already," laughed Hester. "Have you not heard it from Amy? She went off to Liverpool in the height of displeasure, but, before the Captain and Amy had been at home a fortnight, who should arrive there but Aunt Copp, with two chests of linen as a present and a silver tea-pot."

"Then she is with them now?"

"And no doubt will be till Christmas," added Hester.

"Mamma," said Annie, looking in, "tea is ready. Are we to bring Aunt Hester's up with yours, or will she come down into the parlour?"

"Bring it up," said Hester.

"No, no," interrupted Mrs. Halliwell. "I must not monopolise you entirely; what would Alfred say? Go down and have your tea with him, and come up to me again afterwards."

Before Hester had been many days at the Vicarage, it struck her that the two girls had some secret between them. Upon going into a room she more than once surprised them in a whispered conversation, and at the sight of her they had started from each other like detected criminals, their faces turned to crimson. However, she attached little importance to it, imagining it to be some girlish secret. They had but scant leisure. Since Betty died, Mr. and Mrs. Halliwell had kept no regular servant; a woman went for three or four hours a-day to do the rough part of the household work, and Emma and Annie did the rest. All their spare time was occupied in crochet-work, which they did to sell. A shop at Camley (an aristocratic village three miles off) took it from them, and they earned a good bit of money at it between them, some weeks as much as eight or ten shillings. But they did not have it regularly, there was so much competition for that sort of work.

On the Wednesday week after Hester got there, she was sitting in Mrs. Halliwell's room when Annie came in to ask something about the dinner.

"Where's Emma?" inquired Mrs. Halliwell.

"She is gone to Camley, mamma."

"To Camley! My dear, why does she not say when she is going?

Your aunt would have liked the walk with her, this fine morning. And why is it always Emma who goes to Camley? You should take it in turns, Annie. You ought to walk sometimes, confined as you are in-doors so much."

Annie did not answer, but Hester noticed a very vivid blush rise to her face as she left the room hastily.

"It is a fine morning," observed Hester, "for so late in the year."

"I am sure a walk would do you good, Hester. If you put on your bonnet now you will catch up Emma."

"I should not like to leave you for so long," said Hester.

"Oh, that's nonsense," returned Mabel, with a touch of her old, hasty manner. "You will be back in a couple of hours, and I shall not run away the while. Tell Emma, when you catch her up, that I do not approve of her always being the one to go to Camley and leaving poor Annie at home."

Hester was tempted to the walk, for, excepting to the church on Sunday, she had not been out since she arrived and she felt that she wanted air. So she departed, and walked fast to overtake Emma; but she could not see her, and at length reached Camley. The shop, where she expected her niece to be was readily found, and she entered it: but they said that Miss Halliwell had been and gone, nearly a quarter of an hour.

"How in the world can we have missed each other?" thought Hester. However, it was of no use deliberating and streaming about Camley; the only thing was to make the best of her way home again.

Accordingly, she turned back; but, in passing along the village, her eyes happened to wander to the windows over an opposite shop, where grocery, chandlery, brooms, brushes and other miscellaneous articles were sold. Hester stopped involuntarily, for surely she saw Emma Halliwell's side face at that upstairs window! Though it was but for a moment, for the face went back behind the folds of the crimson curtain. Hester crossed the street, intending to knock at the private door and ask for her. But the thought that it might not be Emma caused her to waver: whoever it was, wore no bonnet and seemed to be quite at home: she remembered also that her nieces had said they had no acquaintance in Camley. So Hester passed on, and reached home. Emma had not returned. Hester said nothing, only that she had missed her. A full hour afterwards she saw her coming down the churchyard steps hurriedly, her face the colour of a peony. Hester ran and opened the door.

"Emma, you have been a long time," she remarked.

"The patterns were not ready," was Emma's prompt answer. "I had to wait. I thought they were going to keep me in the shop till night."

"There's something wrong here," thought Hester to herself. But she said nothing then: it was not a fitting opportunity.

In the afternoon the equipage of the Reverend George Dewisson came prancing up to the churchyard steps, and the Reverend George alighted from it, walked down them and knocked at the Vicarage door. A rare honour; for since his induction to that rich living, he had grown more stiff and unsociable than ever. The Earl of Seaford had died within two years of his appointment to it, and the Reverend George had then married. His wife was a lady in her own right; old, and grand and sour; she was one of five sisters, who were all as poor as the poorest mouse in St. Paul's Church, but he had been caught by the title and had married her.

Mr. Halliwell and his sister received him, and in the course of conversation the former remarked that Lady Lavinia never came now to see Mrs. Halliwell.

"There are—aw" (the Reverend George had talked in a constrained manner when he was curate, and pomposity was added to it now)—"certain rules of society, which—aw—Lady Lavinia, from her position, is especially obliged not to—aw—transgress. She requested me to state, should the subject be led to by you, that she intended no disrespect to—aw—*Mrs. Halliwell*, by abstaining from calling."

The words, and the peculiar stress upon his wife's name, puzzled Mr. Halliwell.

"But when—aw—a young lady (as, of course, a clergyman's daughter must be considered, be her pecuniary circumstances ever so unfavourable) gives herself up—or, I may say, in this case, give themselves up, to—aw—low company; to, in short, an appearance of—aw—bad conduct, it cannot be expected that Lady Lavinia can—aw—countenance the family."

Hester blushed for his bad feeling and vulgar words. If ever the temptation was strong upon her to tell the world how he had obtained his living, it was then. But she sat silent.

Mr. Halliwell's mouth opened with amazement. "Do you allude to my daughters?" he enquired.

"I am obliged to say I do. To—aw—the elder one especially."

"Why, what have they done?" he asked.

"Report says, that they—at least—aw—one of them, is upon familiar terms, in—aw—a very familiar sense of the word indeed—with a man who lives at Camley. Some low musical fellow of the name of Lipscome, who gets his living by—aw—fiddling and such things."

Hester's heart went pit-a-pat against her side, for she remembered the vision of Emma's head that very morning, and her deliberate untruth afterwards. She listened to the further particulars, rumours, he called them, entered into by Mr. Dewisson; and when that gentleman left she laid her hand on her brother to detain him (for he was hastening nervously into the room where the two girls were seated at their crochet) and spoke calmly.

"There must be some mistake in this, Alfred. Leave me to

penetrate it. The children will be confused and alarmed if you question them. You are looking now white with apprehension. Go out on your afternoon parish round; and, above all, say nothing to Mabel."

Hester took her knitting into the other parlour and sat down by her nieces, who had their heads together, as usual, whispering.

"Which of you two young ladies is it," she began in a careless tone, "who is upon intimate terms with Lipscome, the music-master?"

Annie gave a half scream, looked at Emma, and began to tremble violently. She was by far the more excitable and the more sensitive of the two. Emma bent her head lower over her work, and her very neck grew scarlet. Neither spoke.

"Annie," said her aunt, thinking she would question the one whom she suspected to be the least guilty, "are you upon familiar terms of friendship with this Mr. Lipscome?"

She burst into tears. "No," she sobbed, "indeed I am not. I have seen but little of him."

"Have you not occasionally gone to his lodgings—where he lives alone? That is very pretty, I think, for a young lady."

"I have never been inside his door," cried Annie, earnestly. "It is not my fault."

"What is not your fault?"

"Good gracious, Aunt," interrupted Emma testily, "if we have spoken, once in a way, with Mr. Lipscome, where's the harm of it? Papa and mamma would like to keep us curbed up, like mice in a trap. Don't make yourself such a simpleton, Annie: there's nothing for *you* to sob over."

"There is a great deal of harm," returned Hester in stern tones, for the girl's careless words provoked her. "A communication has been made to your father that you have acted so as to raise serious reports against your fair fame. It is not possible that you, a clergyman's daughter, carefully brought up, can have conducted yourself so as to deserve them."

"Oh, Emma," implored Annie, in deep agitation, "tell the truth. You know it cannot be hidden always. Tell Aunt Hester: perhaps she will break it to papa."

Hester's flesh was creeping all over: she hardly knew what dreadful thing to fear. It did not creep less at Emma's next words.

"*Will* you stand between me and papa's anger, Aunt Hester?" I know it is very bad, but it is done."

"What is done?" breathed Hester, hardly able to get the words from her dry lips.

"I am married," she whispered.

(*To be continued.*)

WITH THE NIGHTINGALES AT THE VICARAGE.

OUR parish is not one that presents much striking variety of scenery, though it is rich here and there in by-ways, in umbrageous, greeny nooks, and its hedgerows are delightful. Not a right-of-way through the smallest farm but you come on "nestling places green, for poets made," as Leigh Hunt has it, in little strips of coppice or woodland, that run like a rich trimming round a plain, solid dress of fairest colours.

One little dell we have in our eye, where all is so nicely bright, yet shaded, that you might fancy naiads or sylphs at play among the lush leafage; where, while the ear is charmed with the soft ripple of water, hardly distinguishable from the whispering of the leaves, you can look through the sheltering screen at the distant water-mill—the only thing that suggests human activity within eye-range, and by contrast seems to add to the sense of repose, serenity and retirement.

On the boundaries of our parish, to the east and to the west, there are low, swelling hills crested with trees nicely dotted in; and along the slopes of one of these lies a wood, in which it is my delight to stroll or to lie and realise at mid-day the sense of that Pan-like silence which the ancients fabled to haunt the noon-day woods when Pan was abroad.

In the centre of our district the ground is flat, but fertile; and the meadows are lush, and, in the season, bright with buttercups and cowslips.

So far as respects tree-planting the Vicarage is, as perhaps it ought to be, the bright spot of the parish. Art and nature have combined to beautify it. In former days some of the incumbents were great arboriculturists, and the present vicar rejoices in their labours and has added worthily his own quota to theirs. You might wander a good way before you came on grounds where, in the words of good old George Herbert, you would find more riches in little room.

The house, somewhat low and angular, lies as it were in the corner of a miniature park; trellised creepers, climbing roses, and, most notable of all, a lovely magnolia-tree, cover the walls and relieve the harshness of outline, seen from whatever point of view; and it gathers its little lawns and rosaries and flower-beds close about it, half-way round it, with shrubberies skirting the outline of these, bright with soft, feathery sumachs, ornamental pines of many kinds—the Glaucus pine among them, with its frosty fringes, peculiarly beautiful—the Judas tree, the Glastonbury thorn, so rich and rare, or something very closely allied to it, with spikes on the branches an inch and a quarter long, and hedges of varicoloured rhododendrons.

This forms a kind of inner inclosure or sylvan sanctum, through

which the farther ground opens up to you in delightful vistas as you look or go from point to point; and from this inner sanctum, at any point, you step at once into the little park of which I have spoken.

On the other side of the road, quite separated from this, lies the main vegetable and fruit garden, with lofty hedges and stone walls for wall-fruit all round it; save, indeed, on the far side, where it gives into a paddock more useful and less ornamental than the park, with which we are more particularly concerned, though it too has some fine trees around it, and one or two within it, on the strong branches of which swings can be placed for the children at merry-making or school-treat.

Round the extreme limit of the park are stately trees of many kinds: beeches, smooth and velvety of bole, running straight up, "like the mast of some great ammiral;" oaks of great antiquity; chestnuts in the early summer, with their creamy pyramids of blossom; a hornbeam or two—rare in this quarter—and some splendid elms, mixed with lilacs, and "laburnums, dropping wells of fire" in their season; hop-elms, a cedar or two, and a few lime-trees, with no end of lower shrubbery wood—red-thorns, black-thorns, white-thorns, etc. etc.

Dotted into the park itself, with the most artistic regard to points of view, are copper-beeches, pollard oaks, with sweeping branches, tent-like, broad, umbrageous, walnut-trees, birches—graceful ladies-of the-wood—and a few mountain-ashes—"Oh, rowan tree; oh, rowan tree, thou'lt aye be dear to me!" And from whatever part of this boundary you may look, you cannot but admire the art shown in so disposing the trees that the limits of the little park on the other side seem to be indefinite and distant.

This park abounds with birds, for the vicar is a great bird-lover as well as tree-lover, and has even been heard to say, when practical-minded persons have told him of the fruit the birds would eat or destroy, that he would rather be without the fruit than lose the music of the birds, which make him delightful concert the live-long day, and have even relieved and sweetened to him weary hours of night.

It would seem as though the birds knew it, for they build in the most exposed places here, where one can stand and look on the callow young ones in the nest, raising and opening little beaks as you "'tweet, 'tweet" to them and put the finger near; or into the deep, dark, liquid eyes of the mother-bird, as she sits brooding over eggs or young ones.

On one occasion a boy had intruded, found out and carried off one of these nests. The vicar's daughter, passing that way, saw the mother-bird sitting disconsolately on the tree from which the nest had gone. The culprit was speedily found (for all things are soon known here, and nothing can long be hid), followed and compelled to bring back the nest with its little family, and put it in exactly where it was before in the branch; and the disconsolate mother was comforted, and reared that brood there to maturity.

Our vicar's delight in his flowers, trees and birds, as indicating a freshness of feeling and capability of youthful joyance, in spite of sad turns of ill-health, is beautiful to see. The park is a haunt of nightingales, which discourse the sweetest music all through the summer night; and this is an additional delight and source of pride to our vicar, who in no way wishes to keep all his good things to himself.

One evening in the end of May last, we went, full of expectation, to listen to the nightingales. A crescent moon hung in the silver-blue sky and shed a soft silvery lustre around, strong enough to make a pleasant light, yet not strong enough to cast shadows too deep to be eerie. In a little arbour we sat waiting, and what is waited for is invariably long in coming. But also it is true, and how delightful 'tis that 'tis also true, in the words of the French proverb, that "all things come to him that can wait."

We waited, beguiling the time in talk of many things—literature, art and music: and at length the music of the nightingale at once crowned and silenced our talk. The shadows of the trees, like finer ghosts of themselves, lay lengthened on the grass. The leaves of the lime and the poplar gently fluttered, even when there seemed no breeze to stir them, and an almost inaudible murmur appeared to steal across the thick, long grass, here and there cluster-starred with marguerites, that faintly wavered in the moonlight, in the pauses of that song.

The pauses grew shorter and shorter as we sat and listened. At first there was more of a complaining, plaintive air, varied only now and then with trills, gurgles, penetrating rolls and half-whistles (we cannot describe that indescribable music, though its subtilely pertinacious, penetrating sweetness is found in no whistle). Gradually the tones grew deeper, fuller, richer, as though the mere act of singing had brought its own comfort; nay, its own delight—the triumphant, mellow, full tones predominated; the shower of song fell on our ears like sweet rain on the wastes of the desert.

We at length arose and proceeded down the crescent path that bounds the park, till we stood close to the tree from which the music came, actually touching its leaves. Still, the bird was so rapt in its song that it did not perceive us, or, perceiving us, was so rapt in its delight that human presences were indifferent to it—or, it may be (who knows?) were even stimulating, as the sense of a sympathetic audience to a great *prima donna.*

And doubtless not far off "the music of the moon slept in the plain eggs of the nightingale," as the poet sings; and that was inspiration too; for the song we have is ever but the herald of songs to come, and an aid to the brooding love that is active to make them come. With the nightingale, as with the human heart, it sings when it labours to prepare and to perfect the life which shall enjoy the love that it feels within, throbbing and prophetic.

Still, the music flowed, gathered, swelled; now piercing clear; now

lowly plaintive; again, as if calling some loved one who lingered afar; again, as though that loved one were near—were near. Those pipings and jug-jug-jugs how impossible it is to reproduce them, however clearly recalled; and it seemed that, instead of satiating, they grew ever more sweet and intense to ear and heart. We stood—none of us knew how long—close to that sweet heart of minstrelsy; fearless, unseen of us, yet doubtless seeing us; and as we were moved more and more, so more and more the music seemed to grow, and swell and quiveringly vibrate, and deepen and flood all the moonlit fields and meadows round about. How the other birds can sleep soundly in their nests is indeed a wonder!

When at last we turned and bade our friends good-night, it seemed that the nightingale's music followed us for a mile or more through the scented sweetness of the night; and that, as at last it grew faint the notes of other nightingales came faintly on the ear from far, and more distinctly nearer to us, as though nightingales were sheltered in familiar spots close to our own abode, where before we had never guessed them to be. Or is it that the delighted ear is the only truly prepared ear for kindred harmonies?

ALEXANDER H. JAPP.

THE WIND'S MESSAGE.

THIS June wind that softly blows,
Over dreaming pastures goes
Till it finds a certain Rose.

Happy breeze! for you may go
Where I dare not pass, you know
You may kiss her brow of snow.

You may shake rose-petals fair
On the plaits of golden hair
And the sweet arms white and bare

You may stroke her head of gold,
And her white gown's dainty fold,
As I used to do of old.

You may tell—ah, tell her, pray!
All she cannot hear me say
Now I am so far away.

Tell her you have touched and known
Singing lips that miss her own.
Say I love her—her alone!

E. NESBIT.

THREE OFFERS.

I.

"MAB, papa wants you. In the study."

I threw down my mallet on the smooth lawn—those were the days of croquet, when tennis was an unknown game—and looked questioningly, with an anxious glance, at Tom, my brother, who brought this unexpected and unwelcome summons.

"What is the matter, Tom?" I asked. "Did he say why he wanted me?"

"Oh, a lecture of some sort, I suppose!" returned Tom with impatient disgust. "You stood on one leg in church last night, or turned in your toes as you came in to breakfast!"

Tom was unsympathetic; he thrust his hands deep into his pockets and sauntered away. But the girls, their faces full of commiseration, came from every corner of the lawn towards me. Their portentous faces and portentous tones were comforting but not inspiriting.

"Has papa sent for you, Mab?"

"Why does he want you?"

"You broke a pot in the conservatory, Mab, perhaps it's that."

"Poor Mab! I saw him looking at you at breakfast this morning in a peculiar way. And your collar was frightfully askew."

"Is it straight now?" I asked, looking anxiously from one to another of the sympathetic group.

"Yes; but your dress is torn. Here's a pin; pin it up beneath the sash. Oh, and what a green stain there is on your flounce!"

I moved towards the house, followed by many warnings and eager-voiced injunctions.

"You hair's untidy, Mab. Can't you smooth it?"

"Your sash has come untied."

"Mab, your hands are grubby. Remember to keep your hands behind you."

I entered the house and went through the hall towards the "study," the pleasant, sunny back room, where my step-father studied the innumerable faults of his step-family, and the best methods of correction and prevention. I was just seventeen, and, in some respects, young for my years; my heart was beating very fast as I paused at the study door. With two hot little hands I smoothed back my hair; I looked down ruefully at my stained print gown. Then I gently tapped.

"Come in," answered my step-father's smooth, mellow voice; and I meekly entered.

My father was not alone. Mabel Campion, our distant cousin, my father's ward, sat in a low chair near him. She was a tall, graceful, very gentle girl of twenty; her elbow resting on her knee, her chin upon her hand, she sat looking up at her guardian with a reverential glance. As I entered she blushed, looked doubtfully at me, then doubtfully but very meekly at my step-father, as though awaiting his commands.

"Yes; I will ask you to leave us," he said, smiling at her—smiling in a well-pleased way, as he never smiled at us.

She smiled too—a faint, sweet, shy little smile. She rose from her chair and moved quietly away, softly closing the door behind her. I and my step-father were left alone.

The benign smile with which he had followed Mabel lingered for a minute about his smooth, clean-shaven lips, and during that minute he ignored my presence. Then, in a slow way, he altered his attitude, put his elbows, clad in spotless broadcloth, on the arms of his study chair, let his finger-tips meet, and let his brown eyes rest critically on me.

No doubt I contrasted unfavourably with Mabel. My pink print dress was too short for me; here and there, in patches, the pink had faded into white; an unsightly green stain disfigured the flounce in front. My hands were sun-browned and, as the girls had warned me, "grubby." My face was freckled, my fair hair disordered. I was keenly conscious of my defects; and in my humility I stood in the limpest of attitudes, apologising for my existence by an extremity of embarrassment.

"Perhaps you can find a seat, Mabel," said my step-father in his mild level voice. No one but him ever called me "Mabel;" to the rest of the world I was "Mab." But my step-father never descended to the frivolity of pet-names.

I found a seat—a seat in a distant part of the room, behind the knee-hole writing-table. But my step-father indicated a straight-backed chair which stood just opposite his own, and I returned reluctantly but meekly and sat facing him.

"I wish to speak to you, Mabel."

"Yes, papa."

"You are breathless, my dear. I am in no hurry. I will wait for you to compose yourself."

I coloured guiltily. My heart was fluttering in a very breathless way indeed. To strive to "compose" myself, whilst my step-father sat watching me, was a hopeless task; I knew it was hopeless; every effort only deferred the desired effect. I crossed my feet, then hastily uncrossed them. I pushed back my hair, then folded my hands and tried to look unconscious that my hair was rough.

And my step-father all the time sat motionless. Now and then, at intervals, his finger-tips tapped one another softly; but that was the only sign of impatience that he made. His brown eyes regarded me

with a critical but forbearing glance; his large, pale, clean-shaven face wore an expression of conscious gentleness and patience.

"I have two very important pieces of news to break to you, my dear. But I have no wish to excite you. Self-control, Mabel, is one of those elementary virtues without which no character worthy of admiration or esteem can be built. Your poor dear mamma—I do not wish to blame her"—my step-father broke off and sighed indulgently—"I do not wish to blame her for your bringing-up; the wisest of us sometimes err, and her errors must be pardoned however much we must regret them. For your sake I must regret them—deplore them. She undervalued those habits of self-control which, inculcated early, are the most helpful factors in producing a womanly character—such a character as—as, for instance, our Cousin Mabel's, strong yet submissive, self-reliant yet dependent, dignified yet meek."

My step-father's glance wandered away from me; he smiled benignly, reflecting on virtues which I had not.

"If I had had the supervision of your very early education," he sighed after a minute, "you and your sisters, Mabel, would have learnt in the nursery, in early babyhood, those habits which you now find it well-nigh impossible to learn. Your mind is fussily-strung, my dear—excuse the expression. You have no mental tranquillity. Even at this moment you are excited and impatient. I have, as I say, two important pieces of news to break to you; but I will wait for five minutes or so, until you have composed yourself a little and cease to fidget in that nervous manner."

Perhaps the minutes that passed before my step-father again addressed me were in actual number only five; I know that they seemed like thirty.

"You are seventeen, Mabel, if I remember correctly," he said at last, breaking the silence; "seventeen, two months and five days. Correct me if I am not exact."

"Yes, papa. I was seventeen on the first of May."

"Young!—young," he mused, regarding me with gentle disfavour. But your mother was younger when she married first. Mabel, my love, have you ever thought much upon the subject of—of—well, I may say of marriage, Mabel?"

The question was confusing. "I—I don't know, papa," I stammered.

"You don't know?" he repeated tolerantly, with faint, very faint, amusement. "That is a very youthful answer. You are old enough, at all events, to have realised that it would be desirable that some of you should marry. Your poor dear mother brought me a large and expensive family; and although I have striven to stand in the place of a father to you all, and although I flatter myself that my devotion and patience have been even more than parental, yet—yet my purse is but slender, Mabel, and it will certainly be expedient that some of you, at least, shall marry."

"Y—yes," I answered, doubtfully and vaguely.

"I shall be glad if you will tell me, my dear, if you have any—partiality—respect, esteem—for any person in particular?"

I gasped. I did not laugh, though my thoughts flashed forwards to the merry time I should presently enjoy when the study door should have closed behind me, and, out of my step-father's earshot, the girls grouped in easy but inelegant attitudes around me, I should repeat this speech dramatically to an appreciative mirthful audience. By-and-bye my brilliancy would be applauded. For the present, I was dumb, and my dumbness, no doubt, seemed foolish to my step-parent, whom words never failed.

"I believe I asked you a question, Mabel," he observed, with an air of almost pious patience.

"Y—yes, papa."

"I am waiting, my dear, for your answer."

He might wait for ever. I was meek in my step-father's presence; I answered him in a small voice; I never dared to contradict him—but in a silent way I could be obstinate. Did he expect me to tell him the secret which was mine, my own, unshared, which even the girls did not guess and never should guess! Had he guessed it?—the thought made my heart stand still; I forgot my fear of him and glanced sharply and suspiciously into his round white face.

"Our young neighbour at the Cedars has been often here of late."

"You mean Ned?" I interrogated in a careless tone. I had thought I possessed some dramatic talent, but that careless tone cost me a gigantic effort, and, after all the effort, was discernible. I knew I blushed. I grew hot, then cold.

"I mean Edward Barnet—yes. As I observed, he has been often here of late."

"He always comes when he's at home," I explained, hastily. "He always did. He comes because he has nothing else to do. He—he likes to come."

"Certainly. I have no wish to dispute that statement. My dear Mabel, you are blushing—a graceful habit for some complexions; your blushes, my dear, remind one a little too much of the peony. May I conclude, my love, that there is some attachment, some partiality on your side for Mr. Barnet?"

"We all like him," I replied, doggedly, emphatically, with a sort of eager indifference. "Of course we like him—we are neighbours—and—and we have always known each other."

"Friendship is the very best basis for a yet warmer feeling," replied my step-father in a satisfied tone. "Mabel, Mr. Barnet called on me last night to ask me to allow him to speak to you concerning—concerning this subject ——"

"This subject?" I repeated, in a bewildered way.

"He tells me he is in love with you. He wishes to ask you to be his wife."

I think I had forgotten that I was shy and frightened; I had risen from my chair and gone to the window, escaping from that calm, mild, steady glance, that contemplated my rosy cheeks and smiling lips and the happy light that I knew was shining in my eyes.

"To ask me?" I repeated. "Me?—me? Me—to be his wife!"

"Mabel, if you will be good enough to return to your seat, we can perhaps discuss this question quietly."

"Papa, it is not true! There is some mistake."

"Please sit down, Mabel. Allow me to finish what I was saying."

Like one in a dream I came back to my seat; the ground as I moved surely did not touch my feet! I trod on air. Ned loved me! —Ned loved me!—the bees were humming those three little words outside the window; the birds were twittering the same delicious truth from every tree. Ned loved me!—and when had I not loved Ned?

"Did he *really* say that?—really?—you're not imagining it?" I questioned, awe of my step-father entirely lost in a stronger feeling.

"You are exciting yourself, Mabel. It is much to be regretted that your poor dear mother's fussy disposition has been inherited by so many of her children! You in particular, Mabel, have a tendency on the slightest provocation to become hysterical."

"I don't think so, papa."

The contradiction was unlooked-for; my step-father's brown eyes grew rounder and bigger, their glance of mild surprise and displeasure should have crushed me completely—but I met the glance and smiled back contentedly, unabashed.

"I will confess, my dear, that Mr. Barnet's choice has astonished me. We will not discuss his taste. You are young, and possibly will improve. The discipline of married life will no doubt cure many of those faults which I deplore in you. As Mr. Barnet is twenty-five years of age, old enough to guide his own actions, I did not feel it to be my duty to save him from what, if I regard the matter impartially, I regret to say that I consider a mistake. He will doubtless repent of his marriage—but that is his own affair. I have won his gratitude by giving my cordial consent to his addressing you. I have promised to sanction the engagement ——"

For once the smooth, monotonous voice was like sweet music in my ears. I sat and listened, smiling softly—not a smile of amusement, but of happiness. I remember those blissful minutes still; I remember them as clearly as though they had passed but yesterday; they belong to the past of twenty years ago. How blue the sky was! —great white clouds slowly crossed it, travelling from the west; there was a quiet sort of murmur of rustling leaves; amongst the tall white lilies the bees were busy; the last of the hay was being carried in the meadows beyond our garden; all the air was sweet with perfume.

The monotonous voice droned on:

"I told Mr. Barnet that I would first address you on the subject. He made some objection to my doing so—but I over-ruled it. I believe he said that he should come this morning for his answer; I am not sure, but I think he mentioned that he would wish to call on you this morning. My interview with him was somewhat abruptly terminated; a visitor was unfortunately announced when I had had but a few minutes' conversation with him. However, I think I understood that he meant to call this morning. Knowing your impulsive disposition, Mabel, I thought it best to prepare you. I wished you to be perfectly clear about my feelings on the subject; you have my permission to accept him; you have my full approval."

"Thank you, papa." He seemed to expect my thanks; I rendered them mechanically.

"Mr. Barnet, if not a very wealthy man, is not a very poor one. It is as good a marriage as you can expect to make; and I desire that you will accept him. I am not sure what the exact amount of his income is, but ——"

"If Ned had fifty pounds a year, if he were a blacksmith or a carpenter or—or anything, I would marry him like a shot if he asked me!"

"My dear, your English, if graphic, is scarcely classical."

"But I don't want to know what Ned's income is. I don't care a bit!"

My step-father slightly smiled, then slightly sighed.

"I may tell Mr. Barnet, then, that you entertain his proposal?"

"Yes. I love him," I said simply.

Someone tapped at the door; the door opened.

"Mr. Barnet," announced the white-aproned, soft-voiced, parlour-maid; and Ned came in.

His sun-browned face had a ruddier tinge than usual, he was evidently embarrassed, but even in his embarrassment there was a sort of boyish frankness and dignity; he was humorously conscious of being ill-at-ease, and he humorously appreciated the odd experience. He nodded and smiled at me as he shook hands; then he turned with an eager, searching glance towards my step-father.

"I have been having a serious little talk with Mabel," my step-father said, in his slow, mild tone. Nothing ever made him hasten in his speech. "A very serious little talk."

Ned looked towards me. I could not understand the glance; he looked as though he wished that I would go.

"I have laid your proposal before her."

Again Ned glanced quickly in my direction; he was silent; my step-father slowly continued:

"And she is inclined to entertain it ——"

"She accepts me?"

"She admits that she is very much in love with you."

I did not see Ned's face, my eyes were fixed upon the brown roses

on the carpet; but I heard the joyous little exclamation with which the news was received.

"Where is she?" asked Ned, after a moment's pause.

"Mabel, my love, come here," said my step-father in his smoothest tone. He took my hand between his own and led me towards Ned, who stood perfectly still and made no movement to meet me. He took Ned's hand, too; he put our hands together. I looked up—I looked into Ned's eyes, and he looked back into mine; with a little cry I drew my hand away and he quietly released it. I remember still the kind, regretful look, he gave me.

"Mr. Dale," he said, in his frank clear voice, "we have made a mistake. Perhaps the fault was mine—but I think it was yours. I love Mabel. Mab and I are the best and firmest of friends, but my love is Mabel's—I thought you understood."

"You are speaking of Mabel Campion."

"Yes. She is your ward; I thought it right to tell you, her guardian, that I hoped to try to win her."

"You should have made your meaning clear, sir."

"I thought I had done so."

"You were under a misapprehension. I certainly should not have given my consent to your addressing the young lady of whom you speak. She has this morning promised that she will be my wife——"

Those were the last words I heard as I stole from the room. I stole out softly, shutting the door noiselessly behind me. Then I fled—fled blindly—through the passage, through the orchard, and out into the country lanes. In the house or garden the girls would find me. They were dear girls! but they would be curious and question me. They were kind, and they would pity me, and comfort me!—and I could not yet bear their comfort or their pity!

I threw myself down on a grassy bank beneath a high shady hedge, and buried my hot face in my hands, and tried to get used and hardened to the feeling of my shame. The shame seemed to burn out all other feelings. I forgot my love; I only realised my humiliation.

Two or three scalding tears fell through my fingers; then the tears dried up. My head throbbed and burnt; my hot hands, pressed against my brow, did not cool it.

There was a sound of advancing steps, and I rose hurriedly to flee. At the same moment Ned came in sight round the curve of the high-edged lane. I guessed rather than saw that it was he; I walked on swiftly, away from him, down the grass-grown path.

Would he be kind and let me go? Would he pretend not to see that I was before him as I was pretending not to know that he was behind me? Would he spare me the humiliation of standing face to face with him again? — The questions whirled through my brain, whilst I listened with strained attention to the firm quick steps that followed.

The steps hastened; he meant to overtake me. When I realised his intention I stood still. A green gate opened from the lane into a meadow; I stood still beside the gate and waited for him, half facing him as he advanced, my cheeks in a scarlet flame, my eyes defiant, daring him to pity me.

If he showed that he was sorry for me, I would never forgive him! If he was embarrassed and conscious of my embarrassment, I should hate him always!—always!

He came to the gate, and stood still before me.

"Mab," he said.

His tone was a little graver than usual, but frank and simple and direct. Somehow, though he had spoken but one word, the bitter edge of my humiliation vanished; my eyes looked across at him with a less defiant glance.

"Mab, you're not going to let this spoil our friendship?"

"N—no," said I doubtfully. "It needn't—unless ——"

"There is no 'unless'," replied Ned, in his old masterful tone that set me at ease at once. "A silly girl, with no sense and pluck, would think it necessary, perhaps, to be dignified and distant and avoid me. But you're not that kind of girl at all! Mab, I shall be awfully disappointed in you if you let this make any difference to us."

It was the familiar voice of authority which, ever since I was a toddling baby, and Ned the knicker-bockered hero of my dreams, I had always been accustomed to obey. Now my eyes met his; we smiled at one another.

"Walk home across the meadow with me, Mab," said he.

He opened the gate and we passed through together. Then he suddenly stood still.

"No, no," he exclaimed, "you've no hat, and the sun is hot."

"I don't mind it."

"Don't you? I mind it for you."

Twenty-five has lordly airs; but seventeen loves its heroes to be masterful. Ned turned back with me through the shady lane; we were silent almost all the way, but our thoughts were busy; at last, on a sudden impulse, I spoke:—

"I am so sorry," I said— "about Mabel."

"Yes," he replied, briefly. Then again he was silent. He walked with me as far as the garden-gate, and there we parted.

II.

FOUR years had passed.

A very silent family sat at the breakfast table this August morning the head of the family had descended in an irritable mood; and his women-folk, observing the puckers on his brow, were nervously anxious to avoid calling his attention to themselves.

"The coffee is cold, Mabel. It's strange that we never have a decent cup of coffee in this house!"

For nearly four years our cousin Mabel had been our step-father's wife; he had long ago ceased to smile at her benignly, and ceased to extol her virtues.

"The toast is tough," he grumbled. "My dear, will you be good enough to give a little thought to these domestic duties. There is one of your children crying!—is that Sydney again?"

"I think so, dear," was the gentle, nervous reply.

"I thought I forbade him to cry."

"Yes. But—but you forget, Adrian. He's such a baby—too young to understand."

"Not too young to be ruined by indulgence. After breakfast you can go to the nursery and send Sydney into the study to me."

"Adrian, you are so severe with him."

"On the contrary, Mabel, I am most gentle. But one cannot too early teach one's children to understand the inevitable consequences of their own actions. When Sydney disturbs our comfort by crying in a foolish and peevish manner, we disturb his idea of comfort by seating him without his toys for two or three hours, with his face towards the wall in the corner of my study."

"But ——"

"Enough on the subject, Mabel. Pray do not become argumentative, my dear."

A painful silence ensued—a silence so heavy and painful that Alice, my youngest sister, boldly broke it.

"Mab, do you know that Ned Barnet's going abroad? He is. I heard it."

Alice suffered for her boldness; our step-father looked slowly in her direction.

"When was that frock of yours clean, Alice?"

"Yesterday, papa."

"So I imagined, my dear," was the mild-voiced reply. No wonder the bills from the laundress are extortionate! You will wear no more washing-frocks this summer. After breakfast you can take off that dirty dress and put on the black serge you were wearing in the winter; you will wear nothing else until I give you permission."

"Papa! there's the Barnets' garden-party to-day."

"You can wear your black serge—or remain at home."

He rose as he spoke, carefully brushing a speck of dust from his sleeve. He had successfully depressed the spirits of us all and his own temper had grown almost placid; the creases in his brow had smoothed themselves out, and he went slowly and contentedly away to administer reproof to his three-years-old son in the study.

I went out of doors into the garden; and there, half an hour later, Alice joined me. She was a pretty graceful girl of sixteen, she came walking slowly towards me with a very woebegone countenance. The

serge dress was badly made and too small for her; the material was coarse and thick; it was a last winter's frock—and last winter Alice had worn her skirts short, and lately she had tasted the dignity of skirts that reached her ankles.

"Look at me, Mab!" she cried, the tears in her eyes, her voice indignant yet pitiful. "Mab, tell me truthfully, do I look absurd?"

"The dress is hideous; but you look pretty in spite of it," said I lovingly.

"Dear old Mab! Oh, Mab, I wish the tables could be turned for a bit and we could be the tyrants; I should like to dress papa in a schoolboy jacket and an Eton collar, and make him wear his hair long in ringlets."

We laughed. Alice linked her hands around my arm, and we strolled slowly together down the garden paths between the trim beds with their low closely-cropped box-borders. I longed to ask a question; a simple question enough, but it was only with an effort, after much deliberation, that I asked it.

"Alice, who told you that Ned was going away?"

"They were talking of it at the Cedars yesterday."

"Ah!—it's true, then!"

"Some scientific expedition wants him to come with them. I didn't listen very attentively—but they're going to explore some place, Africa, or Australia, or some place. His mother was so funny, Mab! She's proud of his being asked to go, but she wants him to refuse. She says it's an honour; and then she forgets the honour and says she has heard of tigers and rattlesnakes."

I made no reply. After a minute Alice chatted on again.

"He'll be away for a year or two if he goes. We shall miss him, shan't we?"

"Yes."

"Don't you think it's odd of him to wish to go?"

"It seems to me quite natural," I replied abruptly, almost sharply. "His scientific work is most absorbing to him; he becomes more engrossed in it every year."

"But he ought to settle down and marry; he's getting so dreadfully old!"

"Not very old. Twenty-nine."

"I wonder why he doesn't marry, Mab. Do you know what the girls have fancied?"

"No."

"They have fancied lately that he meant to marry you."

I turned sharply away. Bending over the sweet-peas, I plucked a sweet-scented, many-coloured handful.

"But he can't marry you if he insists on getting eaten by snakes and crocodiles in Central Africa."

"Don't, Alice!" I exclaimed harshly.

She threw her arm in an impulsive caressing way around my shoulder.

"Poor old Mab! you're not cross?" she questioned.

"No. But don't talk like that—I don't like it, Alice."

Alice regarded me in silence for a moment. "Wouldn't you marry him if he asked you?" said she in a thoughtful tone.

"No."

"Really?"

"Really. Are you surprised?"

"Well, yes; you see, the girls all fancied that you would."

The girls' voices reached us from the lawn, and, after a few minutes, Alice deserted me and ran across the grass and presently her voice reached me with the rest.

I strolled on, away from the sound of the merry chatter and laughter. My heart was heavy, my steps seemed weighted with lead; I had suddenly grown too weary to walk. A little summer-house stood beside the pathway, I entered and sat down on the rustic seat, and laid my arms upon the rustic table.

I looked out with fixed, unseeing eyes, through the open doorway. Two or three minutes passed, then between the doorway and the sunshine Ned Barnet stood.

"May I come in?" he asked, taking the permission for granted and entering even whilst he spoke. He held out his hand, and my hand was still in his when he sat down on the seat beside me.

"I hoped I should find you alone," he said.

I smiled in acquiescence; his tone had a gentle meaning as, of late, it had often had; but I would not understand it.

"I came to speak to you, Mab."

His grey eyes looked down into mine with a direct, frank glance. He still retained my hand and I let it rest there, too proud to draw it away.

"Mab, do you know what I want to say?"

"Yes. You are going away. Alice has just been telling me."

I looked up at him quietly, straight into his eyes. If four years had taught me nothing else, it had taught me some amount of self-control; I could speak in steady tones, glance at him with calm, unfaltering glances, though my heart was sick and sore and aching.

"I am sorry you are going," I said steadily, in the regretful tone in which a friend may speak: "sorry for our sakes. But for your sake I am glad. It will be such a splendid opportunity."

He did not answer me. He rose from his seat and walked to the door. After a minute, I rose too. Standing in the doorway, leaning against the creeper-covered framework, we faced each other.

"That was not what I came to say," he observed at last.

"You're not going?"

"Whether I go or stay, Mab, depends on you," he replied slowly, looking down at me.

My vaunted self-possession deserted me a little then; I was conscious that a wave of colour swept into my face; my glance fell. I

was angry with myself for the blush; with an effort I raised my eyes and looked at him again.

"You want my advice. You must tell me all about the proposed expedition first; I scarcely understand well enough to advise you."

"I don't want you to advise me."

He looked down at me steadily.

"Mab, you know what I want—you know as well as I do. I have tried again and again to speak to you—you know that too. You have always prevented me. But now I *must* speak. I love you, Mab; if you will give me any hope I will stay in England, but if not—if I am no use here, if there is no hope for me—I may as well go."

There was a note of deep feeling in his voice that set my heart beating madly, joyfully. But next moment I was reasoning with my unreasonable happiness, bitterly smiling at it.

"You do not believe in my love," he continued, in his quiet, steady tone. "I have felt your incredulity. But you must believe, Mab."

"I do believe," I returned. I believed that he loved me, but I believed too, that his love was based on pity, I believed that it was a forced growth which he had carefully fostered, and which, if the care and encouragement which he had bestowed on it were withdrawn, would die an easy and natural death. Four years ago he had learnt that I cared for him; the thought of my unrequited love had pained him constantly; he had been very sorry for me, very grateful to me; he had longed and striven to pay the debt of affection which, unasked, I had bestowed. And his heart had answered the demand he made upon it. He loved me—I had watched his love grow, read it in the softer glances which nowadays he gave me, heard it in the gentler, less masterful tones with which he spoke to me. But such love was humiliating—more humiliating than his indifference had been. He loved me, not inevitably, but of deliberate, anxious desire.

"I do believe," I said. "I think you love me—but I think too that, if you try, you will forget me."

"Mab, you are cruel!" he exclaimed, in a quiet voice but reproachfully.

He made no further protest, no stronger denial. Protests were not much in Ned's way, but I chose to ignore that truth. In my pride and bitterness I chose to tell myself that he knew he would, if he tried, forget. Love which is based on gratitude and pity will die an easy death when the basis of gratitude and pity is withdrawn.

"You think me fickle, Mab. Perhaps I deserve your judgment; I have proved fickle once. I shall not change again, I think."

He qualified his assertion by "I think," for Ned's statements were always temperate—but there was little doubt expressed in his voice and glance. He came a step nearer me and took my hands in his and looked down into my eyes. In spite of myself, I let my soul for one long blissful moment drink its fill of happiness. My heart danced; my head was light with intoxicating joy. Then resolutely I

struggled away from the love which tempted me; again I called pride to my aid.

"Ned, tell me one thing. Will you answer one question—truthfully?"

"As many questions as you like—truthfully, you may be sure."

"Did you love me at first because you thought that I loved you?"

"At first, perhaps so. I am not sure. The beginning of my love dates a long way back."

I drew my hands from his, and put them tightly together behind me.

"Ned—lately—" I asked—"what have you thought? Have you fancied I still cared for you?"

He hesitated for a moment. Then: "Yes," he answered, truthfully, "I have thought so. You have often been cold to me, and sometimes a little cruel; but I believe in your heart you love me; I have read your love in a thousand ways."

"You have been mistaken," I returned harshly. "You have read what doesn't exist."

He was silent for a few moments' space.

"You do not love me, Mab?" he asked, in a grieved tone through which a thread of surprise ran. That note of surprise braced my pride, which his sorrow would otherwise have softened. "You used to love me!"

"Why should I be more constant than you? I was a child—no more than a child. Why will you always remember that childish folly against me? One outgrows one's childish loves and hates."

"Is that my answer, Mab?"

"Yes."

I turned away from the door of the summer-house; I went slowly a little way along the garden path. He followed.

"You will very quickly forget me, Ned," I said; and I stopped hastily, in time to check a sob that rose.

"We need not discuss that question," he replied.

"In a year or two you will be rather glad that I refused you."

He half smiled. "You hold one view of my character, Mab, and I another," he responded quietly.

Very slowly we walked towards the house. When we reached it I spoke again.

"Shall you—go away?" I faltered.

"Yes. You have decided that point for me," he replied.

III.

MAY-DAY—a breezy, pleasant day of alternate showers and sunshine. In the garden the laburnum tree is just touched with yellow; the lilac is budding; the trim beds are golden still with the last of the daffodils.

As my step-father has just reminded me, this is my thirtieth birthday. Mabel has kissed me in her gentle fashion and wished me many happy returns of the day; my step-father has smiled, and sighed, and slightly shrugged his shoulders.

"At the age of thirty, my dear, an unmarried woman prefers her birthday to be forgotten," he remarks.

"I prefer it to be remembered," I reply briskly. "Thank you for your good wishes, Mabel."

"Thirty!" says my step-father, in a musing tone. "Thirty!" he repeats, and sighs. "Thirty!— Well, I suppose an old maid is useful in a family."

I laugh. "I am not an old maid yet, papa."

"No?"

His mildly interrogative tone is certainly provoking; my own tone has something, I admit, of spinster-like sharpness as I reply.

"I feel quite as young as I desire to feel."

"That is satisfactory. It is not everyone who at thirty still feels herself to be an ornament in the matrimonial market."

I turn away silently; but my silence serves no purpose.

"An ornament—but relegated to the shelf," continues my step-father, in a musing tone, with a contemplative smile.

"Age has, at all events, its advantages, papa. Sarcasms at thirty fail to touch one."

He professes not to hear me. "As far as I can see, my dear, Barnet means to leave you to grace that shelf."

I have carried the pinafore I am making to a distant widow; I, too, profess to be deaf to the words which I will not hear.

"Let me give you credit for one virtue," the smooth voice continues. "You are patient. You have smiled on Barnet for thirteen years, and still are unwilling to regard the task as hopeless!"

I have said that sarcasms no longer have the power to hurt me; but the boast is vain. In spite of my thirty years I turn away now with burning cheeks, with childish anger, with the tears springing to my eyes.

I take my work into the garden. The garden is quiet, for the children are in the schoolroom at their lessons and my own sisters are all married and gone. The lawn is closely shaven, smooth as silk; the box-borders are trim as ever; the beds are guiltless of a weed. I take the path which, nine years ago, I took with Alice, and I stop now as I stopped then at the little rustic summer-house beside the pathway. I lean, in a musing pensive mood, against the framework of the entrance and look absently before me at the dancing branches wet with rain, at the moving patches of light and shadow that the branches cast upon the path, at the lilies-of-the-valley beneath the wall, at the bed where by-and-bye the sweet-peas will blossom.

The sweet-peas were blossoming on that morning, nine years ago, when Ned and I stood here together. My thoughts travel slowly

back across those nine years, recall their history, and slowly return to dwell upon the present—the joys and sorrows of to-day.

"Many happy returns of the day to you."

I start and turn my head. Round the path behind the summer-house, Ned has come suddenly upon me; he stands close beside me, holds out his right hand and smiles in calm friendly unembarrassed fashion.

"Thank you. You remember my birthday, then?"

"Yes. My memory is very good, you know. It is part of my equipment as a scientist."

Ned stands, as he stood nine years ago, in the doorway facing me. Nine years have aged him. He is nearly forty; his thick hair is turning a little grey, his short bushy beard is sprinkled with grey threads here and there, his frank eyes seem to have receded further beneath the grave thoughtful brows, his figure has grown more square, more set:—the truth must be told, he looks middle-aged!

He looks gravely and quietly at me. His manner this morning is very different from his manner on that far-away morning of nine years ago. Now there is no suggestion of love-making. His voice takes no tender modulations, his glance does not linger long with soft meanings on my face. I am thirty; he is approaching forty—we are grown prosaic!

Prosaic?—are we? I cannot speak for him; but I can speak for myself. Nine years ago my heart never ached so badly, never beat so quickly, as it aches and beats to-day. I stand in a quiet pose, my hands loosely clasped before me, and perhaps I look as calm as he; but the calmness is surface deep—no more.

We stand and chat quietly about many things. For the last few weeks he has been from home; and he asks me about the small events that have happened in his absence; and I ask him about the visit he has paid.

"I am not sorry to get back again," he says; but he says it in that sober matter-of-fact tone which admits of no flattering personal interpretation.

"You are tired at last of travelling?"

"Not of travelling—but of country house visits," he replies, with a grave yet humorous smile. "Yes, I believe you are right," he admits, after a moment, smiling quickly but gravely again, "I am tired of wandering."

"The African explorer is settling down into a stay-at-home country squire," I answer.

"For awhile."

"You do not expect the jog-trot life to suit you?'

"Not for long." He does not sigh, and yet there is the suggestion of a sigh in the voice in which he answers.

"Whilst there are worlds to explore you will never be content!"

His grey eyes rest on me. They do not exactly smile; it would

be difficult to correctly describe the expression in their depths. They rest on me with a long look; then he glances slowly away at the slender rain-laden branches of the laburnum, which sway lightly in the breeze and shake down showers of rain-drops which sparkle in the sunlight as they fall.

"Whilst life lasts, Mab, I shall never be content," is all he says; but his tone has a little thrill of deep meaning, and for a moment my heart stands still, then bounds forward at a passionate speed that keeps me silent whether I will or no.

For nine long years the record of our talk with one another has been a record of safe commonplaces, impersonal, unemotional. Only at rare intervals across that desert of years have I caught a glance, a tone, that has made me wonder whether the love I refused to take is dead? Nine years ago I put happiness away from me proudly, impetuously. For nine years I have known regret, loneliness, bitter heart-ache. To-day I have, perhaps, too little pride, as nine years ago I had too much; if I thought he still cared for me, his silence should not stand between us; I would let no ceremonies, no conventionalities, spoil our lives.

"Why are you—not content?" I ask; my tone is steady with an effort.

He turns his head and half smiles at me again. "In another week," he says, as one who has answered my question and changes his tone, "the laburnum and lilac will both be in bloom."

"Yes."

And then we are both silent.

"Ned, we have been friends so many years," I plead, trying to speak easily, frankly, pleasantly, in friendly fashion;—"friends are useless if they cannot grumble to one another! Twenty years ago—fifteen years ago — we used to pour out to one another all our causes of discontent."

He looks before him for nearly a minute before he answers.

"Since then—" he says, and pauses.

"Yes?"

"We have been both more and less than friends."

"Does that prevent our speaking—of our troubles to each other?"

"It prevents my speaking of one trouble to you," he answers simply.

How my hands tremble! I clasp my fingers together. My heart is beating so fast and furiously that I scarcely can draw my breath; my thoughts leap forward to a bold resolve—a resolve too bold to be womanly—a resolve so bold that I dare not pause before I speak.

"Ned, once you said you loved me. You have got over it—your love?"

The reserve, the silence of nine years is broken. It is I who have torn down the barrier! And yet I have only partly destroyed it; he would like to hastily pile up the breach.

"One gets over most things, Mab, in time," he says. But I scarcely hear his words; his voice has a tremor which makes my pulses beat with joy; his face betrays that the time of which he speaks has not yet come.

I scarcely know what I do, but I know that I put out my hand and lay it on his arm.

"Don't get over it, Ned," I say in the lowest of tones; and then, having been the boldest of women, I suddenly become the silliest, and burst into a flood of hysterical foolish tears.

And ten minutes later Ned and I are sitting together on the rustic seat; his arm is around me and his strong clasp holds me close to him.

"You loved me nine years ago when you refused me?" he says, incredulously, repeating a statement I have just, 'twixt laughter and tears, faltered forth.

"Yes; but I thought you loved me out of pity. I thought you would easily forget."

"And I thought my offer had hurt and offended you. I thought your girlish love for me was dead. I resolved not to persecute you with my love, not to speak to you again."

"And you have cared for me—all these years?"

"All these years—yes. And we might have been happy together!"

"And now I am so old, Ned!"

"Old! Not so very old, Mab. If you were younger, you would scorn your grey-haired lover."

"Papa will call it a prosaic match."

We both smile. Our eyes meet, and the smiles in our eyes deepen.

"Whatever his verdict may be, we can bear it with philosophy," says Ned.

And again we smile.

"Is the match a prosaic one to you, Mab?" he questions, a thread of laughter and a thread of tenderness both running through his tone.

My answer is a smile and a question.

"Is it prosaic to you?" I ask. "Oh, Ned, why have we thrown away so many years of happiness?"

"Perhaps the discipline has been good for us," he whispers quietly. "Everything happens for the best to those who do not take their lives into their own hands. And you, Mab, are dearer, sweeter to me than ever."

He gently lays my head upon his shoulder and folds me in his arms. My heart is at rest at last. I would wait another thirteen years for this happiness.

"THIS HURRYING LIFE."

A LITTLE while to pause and rest,
A little space to draw full breath—
Ah me! we are too sorely pressed
Who run for life and death!

We know not what the goal may be,
We know not what the prize when won,
But still we struggle feverishly,
And though we faint, we run.

Some fail beneath the noon-tide heat,
And fall with faces white and wan;
Some hold their course with bleeding feet—
Yet still the race goes on.

And some who fall rise up no more,
Yet other runners take their place;
And still as madly as before
Swings on the furious race!

We have no time to pause and read
The beauty writ in earth and sky;
We may not slacken in our speed,
Or men may pass us by.

The children call us from their play,
And love and friendship speak us kind—
We may not wait to hear to-day
Lest we be left behind!

We still must strain our aching sight,
The goal is nearer than before;
And ever hastens on the night
When we can run no more.

We labour on, we scarce know why,
Nor what reward our toil shall bless;
We rise up ere the sun is high,
And eat the bread of carefulness.

Yet sometimes from the winning post
Comes back the cry of "Labour lost,"
And doubts chill those who strive the most
If gain exceeds the cost.

For there are times when dull and cold
The prizes look when nearer seen;
When lust of power and love of gold
Show base and poor and mean!

And worthless every proud success,
To hearts so toil-worn and oppressed,
And all the world a wilderness
Wherein there is no rest.

Lord! stay this hurrying stream of life,
And check it in its desperate pace!
Withdraw us from this loveless strife
To run a better race.

Where each alike the prize may win,
Where Victory is not to the strong,
And they who triumph find therein
The thing for which they long.

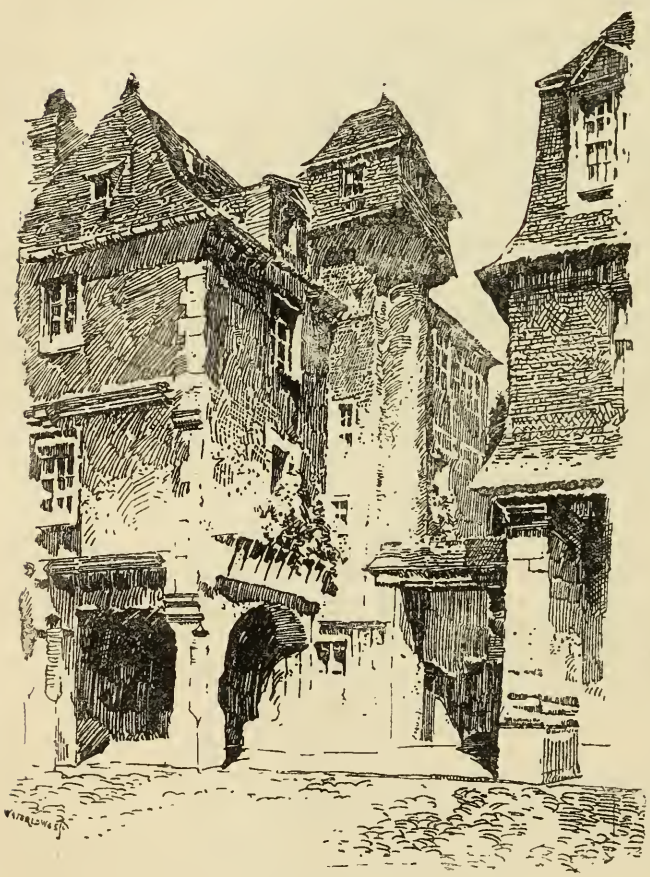
Then if we fall, or if we stand,
'Tis Thou alike our steps wilt keep,
And give, when night is o'er the land,
To Thy beloved sleep.

'Till the day break and shadows flee,
Earth pales, and Heaven is open wide:
And, waking to Thy likeness, we
Therein are satisfied.

CHRISTIAN BURKE.

FAIR NORMANDY.

By Charles W. Wood, F.R.G.S., Author of "Through Holland," "Under Northern Skies," "Letters from Majorca," etc. etc.



Old Houses, Normandy.

WE started one morning from Coutances for a two days' excursion into the country. Our host had provided us with a small victoria, and if our driver did not equal the famous driver of Caen, he was, at least, safe, civil, and obliging.

Every one from the hotel turned out to see us depart; we might have been going away for a month or a year instead of thirty-six hours — for, starting early one morning, we were to return the evening of the next day, in time for the important duties of table d'hôte. The landlord had a hundred recommendations for the driver; the landlady brought forward her best rug, and insisted upon carefully adjusting it about our knees. "If it did not rain there would be dust, and if it did rain a mere umbrella was nothing. It often rained in their country, and when it rained it was always in earnest." A statement with which we thoroughly agreed.

But at that moment the sun was shining in a brilliant and cloudless sky, and we felt we could afford to listen to these gloomy visions. One always hopes for the best, and in broad sunshine the clouds seem very far off. This applies to other conditions of life besides the weather.

At last we were off. Our drive was to be inland; for though not

very far from the sea as the crow flew, we should not at any time approach it.

We might have taken our excursion by train, for the train ran to the chief points at which we touched; but we should not have seen so much of the country, or of the villages and people. It is these small glimpses by the way that give one so many after recollections, and make one feel more familiar with the district that is being explored. We also wished very much to visit the Abbey of Blanchelande, of which we had heard wonders in England, and this was not near to any station.

Our way again led us down the steep hill and past the ruined aqueduct, which looked more ancient and romantic every time we saw it. We also came to the turning to the Château Grâtot, and could not resist a second visit.

It was lovelier than ever. On the steps stood the old woman and the dog, just as we had last seen them. They might have been images of stone, motionless as the steps themselves. But the woman was glad to see us, and received us as old acquaintances.

"Had we heard since we saw her last, from that far off place, England?"

"Did we like Coutances and the neighbourhood, and was it at all like the rest of the world?"

"As for herself, she knew nothing of the world, far or near. She had never travelled. She knew that Paris was the capital of France, but she had never seen it. Once when a young woman, she had gone to Rouen; it was on the occasion of her marriage, and she was only eighteen, but she had never seen it since; had never indeed, gone twenty miles beyond Coutances. The Château Grâtot? She had been told it was very fine and beautiful, and that few places equalled it; but she could not see its great attraction. To her it was a farm house and nothing more; and in winter it was horribly cold."

Just then Katerine came forth with a tray of linen, on her way to the moat. She enquired anxiously after her photograph. "Was it a success, and had we brought her a copy?" We had to inflict a disappointment by telling her that it was not even developed, and would not be until we returned to that far-off spot of earth—England. She seemed to think that in that case she might wait until doomsday for her portrait; and she was not far wrong, for when in course of time it came to be developed, Katerine's pretty head was a very misty and ghostly affair. She had turned it round, you will remember, in the very act of being taken.

She went her way and we went ours, after a last long look at the wonderful old château; and again we said to each other that we had seldom seen anything to equal it.

We passed through very quiet and sylvan country. Through winding roads bordered by hedges, with green fields beyond, and many a richly wooded slope and undulation. Our first halt was at

Lessay, a small town of some sixteen hundred inhabitants, uninteresting in everything except its beautiful church of pure Norman architecture. Lessay owes its origin to a Benedictine monastery founded in 1040 by a Vicomte de Cotentin, who for reasons of his own, which history has not handed down to us, renounced the world and became a Benedictine monk.

Of the monastery nothing now remains but the church, of which the exterior is so fine, that it is worth a long journey to visit. Attached to it was a large house or château, built on the site of the ancient monastery, and probably still possessing many of its traces. It is inhabited by an eccentric old lady, who, at her lodge, keeps an equally eccentric female custodian: a species of Griffin, who would not allow us to move hand or foot, even on the exterior of the château, without her vigilant escort. Whether she had less confidence (and therefore less discrimination) in our personal appearance than the world in general; or whether she had once been deceived, and had given up all faith in human nature, we could not tell—and she was too unamiable to be asked.

The church was cruciform, with a splendid and very massive tower, around which the trees waved, and the rooks flew cawing, holding their parliaments. The tone of the building was singularly fine, and with the surrounding trees it formed a romantic and very beautiful picture.

The little town with its grey, quiet houses, was absolutely uninteresting; and it possessed no ancient relics or mediæval buildings, as it ought to have done, considering the age of its abbey. We saw few people, and as we clattered through the small place we awoke echoes that called forth no excitement. Inquisitive faces did not appear at windows, and doors were not thrown open to see who passed that way.

We continued our drive full of the beautiful Norman minster, whose influence followed us; and presently encountered the one disappointment of our little excursion.

We were now bound for La Haye-du-Puits, a small market town, where we were to halt a couple of hours for rest and luncheon. On our way we should pass the Abbey of Blanchelande, one of the chief points in our drive. The country was delightful; a succession of green fields and flowering hedgerows, rich woods, and a rippling running stream, reflecting the sunshine that poured down and gilded all with its life and warmth.

It was a long white road that we traversed, and few people interrupted its solitude. Now and then, a quiet clumsy countryman met us and gave us a civil and friendly "Bon jour," as they generally do in these remoter parts of the country—in all remote parts of France for that matter; bringing out their greeting with a curious patois that somehow chimes in and blends with an impression of white-washed village cottages, standing in small gardens in which grow

old-fashioned, sweet-scented flowers: gilliflowers and pansies, marjoram and wild thyme, and the yellow daffodil that delights the eye more than the sense of smell. Small tender trees grow about the cottages; limes and birches; and from the open doorways there comes wafted upon the air the perfume of the peat fire that in so many of these country villages, does excellent duty for coal; and the dark purple smoke goes curling upwards from the roof, and if there happens to be a background of larger trees, as is so often the case, what a romantic and lovely picture it all forms.

These visions rise up before one, clear and distinct, as the country people pass you by on the road with their salutation. So it was with us to-day, but our greetings were few and far between. At length a turn in the road revealed a gateway and portals, and a lodge; "and that," said our driver, "is the Abbey of Blanchelande."

He drew up at the entrance, and we rang a peal which clanged and echoed in the quiet avenues that we hoped soon to tread. It was a vain hope. A woman quickly appeared—to our surprise, for if the abbey was inhabited, we had supposed it to be by monks. Still this was merely an entrance lodge; the abbey was some distance beyond the gates, not visible from them; a portress might possibly be allowed here.

She approached and asked our pleasure.

We replied that we wished to see the abbey; had come far for that purpose.

"I am very sorry," she said; "it is all a mistake; the abbey is not shown to visitors."

"Why not?" we asked.

"Because it is strictly against orders. It is no longer a monastery, but is inhabited by a community of ladies, and their privacy cannot be intruded upon. For the rest," added this faithful guardian, "there is not very much to see, even if you could have been admitted."

This was her opinion, but probably she had no eye for the beauties of architecture, and no reverence for antiquity. But we saw that pleading would be vain; there was nothing for it but to depart, leaving the charms of the Abbey of Blanchelande to the imagination.

It was a disappointment, for we had heard a good deal about its beauty, and the desire to see it had been one of the inducements of our present excursion. But we could only make the best of it and went our way, leaving the abbey and its unseen charms, architectural and human, behind us. In due time we reached our mid-day halting place, La Haye-du-Puits.

It happened to be market day, and the place was crowded. After the quiet country roads and the deserted aspect of Lessay, we almost felt as if we had come back to the bustle of the world. The market-place was full of country people, and it was a very lively scene.

There was very little in the way of costume, but this, everywhere, is fast disappearing. In a few years' time one will probably look in vain for what has been so distinctive a feature of Normandy, one of its greatest charms.

The place itself had not a single attraction about it. The church was plain and unadorned, and not worth a visit; the one solitary point about it a tomb of the sixteenth century. Close to it was the inn, crowded with market people, none of them of very agreeable type. The men are primitive in their ways and manners; at table, for instance, often rather tearing their food than eating it according to civilised rules. The landlord had turned himself into his own chef, thus combining two offices in his ministry. He went flourishing about in the orthodox white cap and apron, and looked every inch, not a king, but a cook. He was very civil and obliging, and much regretted that we had elected to go on to St. Sauveur for the night, instead of remaining with him. His hotel was considered far better than any other in that part of the country; he might say so without flattery, and without encroaching on his reputation for modesty.

His "bill of fare" was abundant, but a strange mixture of ingredients, fish, meat, vegetables and sweets appearing without any order of precedence, without rhyme or rule. It was all one to the assembled gentlemen of the market. Their motto apparently was "despatch and quantity," aided by alternate deep draughts of wine and cyder. Nothing came amiss to them; they took of the bottle which happened to be nearest. The result seemed to be in no way detrimental to their constitutions; for the most part they looked bronzed and vigorous.

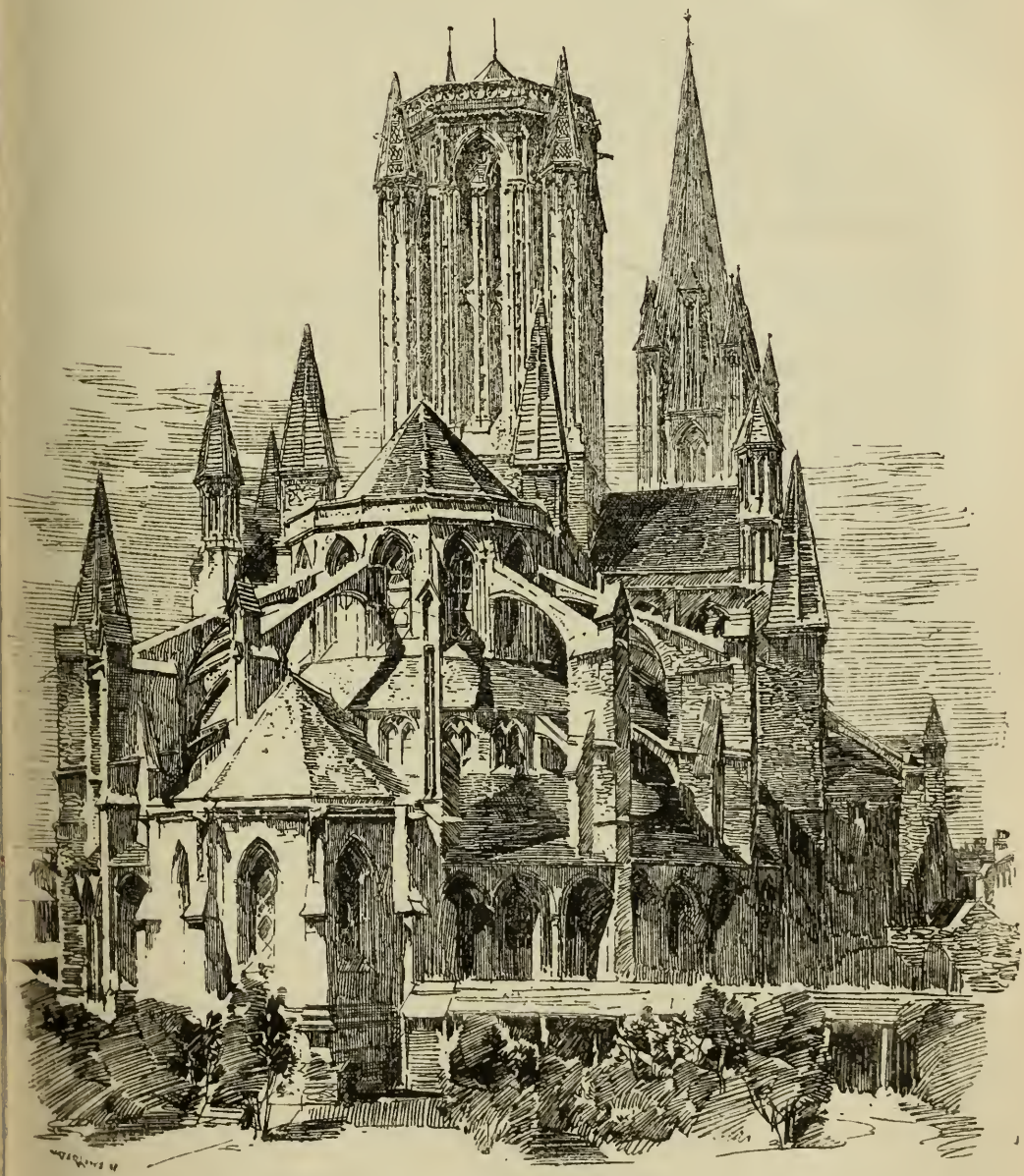
In the market-place we had much amusement with our instantaneous cameras. Some, not understanding the process, took alarm, thinking that we were armed with some infernal machine, which would presently explode with great loss of life. Others more civilised, were highly entertained, placed themselves in attitudes, and were charmed to be taken. The place was so crowded, and the groups were so numerous, that if we had had a hundred plates we could have used them all.

Every species of sale and barter was going on, from the selling of corn and other grain down to the ordinary fruit and vegetable stalls. The fruit was good and abundant, the pears being especially delicious. In the centre of the market-place a waggon was being sold by auction, but the bidding was not energetic, and the final price reached was evidently a disappointment to the owner.

On any other day it is probable that La Haye-du-Puits would have seemed a very deadly-lively place, deserted and uninteresting, without a single point of attraction about it. Here in the far-off eleventh century, there was a strongly-fortified castle, belonging to the founder of the Abbey of Lessay; but all has long since disappeared

except a fragment of old wall, covered with moss and lichen. This lies a little away from the town, and was the only small relic of antiquity that we discovered.

We were not sorry to take up our drive again at the appointed



COUTANCES CATHEDRAL.

time, and leave the bustle and gentle riot of La Haye-du-Puits behind us. The landlord came out, and bowed us away in the full uniform of a chef, with a hundred apologies that he had not been able to give us more of his time and attention, and a hope that we would one day return to honour his establishment.

Away we went through very much the same sort of country that we

had traversed in the morning; fair pastures and richly wooded undulations, and white roads, bounded by pleasant hedgerows. It was towards six o'clock, and the sun was declining, when the little town of St. Sauveur le Vicomte appeared to our vision. As we approached it looked small and unpretending, with red-tiled roofs showing against undulations, and here and there a church tower; a small sylvan place in a sort of depression, the running waters of the Douve falling soothingly upon the ear.

Our driver crossed a bridge and passed from the open country into the quiet street of the little town, turning immediately into a small square, and drawing up at the Hôtel des Voyageurs with the air of a state coachman entering the gates of St. James's on the day of a levee.

I confess that our hearts sank within us, and we felt that we had certainly left life and civilisation behind us at La Haye-du-Puits. We were quite wrong, as it turned out.

We thought that we had certainly never put up at a less promising abode. To all appearance it was nothing but an ordinary estaminet, and the door by which we entered led direct to the kitchen. There on one side was Madame Cotigny, in very simple costume, presiding at a stove, engaged in the mysteries of a pot-au-feu; and on the other side, a screeching parrot, who immediately ordered us off the premises. This order, however, was counterbalanced by Madame, who bade us enter and be welcome, whilst she administered a friendly reprimand to her parrot by tapping it on the head with the hot wooden spoon with which she had been stirring the aforesaid mysteries: a proceeding that turned all the parrot's wrath upon herself.

Somehow the little incident made us feel at home, and we found that if everything was primitive, everything was also excessively clean. And when we had seen our rooms upstairs, and noted the spotless linen and the snow-white curtains, we began to think that we had judged too hastily by outside appearances. This was one of those rare cases where the result was better than the promise.

More was yet to come, for we found that there was a dining-room at the back of all this modest frontage which would not have disgraced an inn of fashion; not from its magnificence, of which there was none, but from its quiet comfort.

We went back to the kitchen to reconnoitre and to see how the land lay, and whether there was corn in Egypt. Madame Cotigny was very friendly and civil, offered us chairs, and apologised for the rudeness of her pet parrot.

"It was nothing but jealousy," she declared. "The bird hates to see any stranger coming into the place; he knows it means work for me, and he thinks that he will receive less attention in consequence. The creature has almost the sense of a human being."

He certainly was listening, with his head on one side, very much as if he took it all in.

"Messieurs are from England," remarked Madame, with a discrimination that did honour to her perceptive faculties. "A hundred small things tell me so, including the *sacs de voyage*. It is not often I receive Englishmen, but I much prefer them to all other nations." A delicately-turned compliment that we did not know whether to take as flattery or an expression of her true sentiments; but we gave ourselves the benefit of the doubt and made our obeisance.

"We hope Madame can give us dinner to-night?" we remarked, thinking that we should have to be thankful for small mercies.

"Parbleu, Messieurs," replied Madame, "a day without dinner would be a day lost in the calendar. It is now six o'clock, and at half-past seven you will be served. That will give you just time to visit the old castle and see a little of the neighbourhood."

We took the hint and departed, not sorry to have exchanged the carriage for the freedom of a walk.

We soon found our way to the castle. Its foundations were laid in the tenth century, and it subsequently belonged to the Tessons and the Harcourts; to fall from them into the hands of Edward the Third, by whom it was given to Sir John Chandos, one of the captains in the wars of the Black Prince.

It has now lost all its military prestige, and has been turned into a hospital for the sick. You pass up a steep incline and under a huge gateway, so strongly built that it looks as if it would defy time itself. It has two enclosures or courtyards, but of the outer one nothing remains but a few ruined walls, three small and dismantled towers, and the postern gateway formed of two more towers. There is a splendid and massive keep-tower, belonging to the earlier structure. Once the courtyards echoed with the clash and clang of swords, and rang with the voices of officers in command. All these have long passed away, and in their place you see quiet Sisters of Mercy hurrying to and fro in their mission of tending the sick and sorrowful; and their footsteps make no echo, and their voices do not startle the air.

From the top of the keep-tower the view was extensive and very fine. The small town lay at out feet, with its few and quiet streets. A plain surrounded us, through which the Douve took its winding course to the sea. There were wooded hills beyond, and country roads bordered by their formal trees. The shades of evening were falling as we looked, and much of the distance was already in obscurity. Every moment the shadows deepened and the river loomed more pale and silvery, whilst the flush of sunset that had illumined the sky with its crimson glory, faded into the afterglow that immediately precedes night and darkness.

We turned from this relic of the past, and presently found ourselves in Madame's comfortable salle-à-manger.

We had to pass through the kitchen to reach it, and the parrot, mindful of the episode of the wooden spoon, looked maliciously at

us but said nothing. As for the dinner, Madame proved herself equal to the occasion. Without being elaborate, it was one of the best we sat down to in Fair Normandy. There was only one other guest besides ourselves; a Frenchman; who told us he was a commercial traveller, made himself very conversational and agreeable, proved a man of sense and information, and gave us many useful hints concerning the neighbourhood and the people. He seemed to know the whole country well, had travelled with his eyes and understanding open, and was really a lover of nature. He spoke eloquently of the hills and valleys and laughing streams, the ancient towns and fine churches of Normandy—he was himself a native of Rouen—and mourned the decline of some of her ancient habits and her picturesque costumes. Year by year he noticed that these were steadily diminishing.

We wondered what business he could find to do in so small a place as St. Sauveur, but were not impertinent enough to enquire and he did not enlighten us. When dinner was over he went his way, and when we came down the next morning it was just in time to see him depart. He made us a polite bow and wished us a Bon Voyage—without which he had not been a true Frenchman—and we saw him no more.

We ourselves, after a modest breakfast, set out for the old Abbey of St. Sauveur, which we had not seen the previous night. We crossed the bridge and the river, turned into a narrow street of small and rather poverty-stricken houses, and came out upon a country road. In a few moments we had reached the gateway of the old abbey. A peal upon the bell brought forth a Sister, dressed after the Order of the Miséricorde, who admitted us.

Of the ancient abbey, founded by the Benedictines in 1080, little remains. It is now the property and the head house of the Sœurs de la Miséricorde, who here receive a certain number of orphan children, whom they clothe, instruct and launch out into the world, thus performing a true work of mercy.

They have re-built the Church of the Benedictines, which stands beside the orphanage. It is a very pretty and quiet corner of the world, and the lines of the children who live here have fallen in pleasant places. The grounds within the boundaries are smooth and velvety; tall trees wave and rustle in the breeze, and cast long shadows over the green grass; the sunshine glistens between the leaves; Sisters in their picturesque garments flit from building to building, looking after their charges, and ministering to their necessities. The abbey itself was ruined during the Revolution: that wicked era that has so much to answer for in the way of destruction.

As we went towards the church, a Sister met us and offered to conduct us through it. She was very chatty and cheerful, and entered into all sorts of worldly topics. She was enthusiastic about her Order, devoted to the Mother Superior, and full of love for their

little flock. She took intense pride in the church, which she seemed to think more beautiful than anything that had ever been built since the creation of the world: mourning above all that the young architect had died of consumption during its progress, and so had never looked upon the completed fruits of his labour.

The little Sister flitted from point to point, from aisle to choir,

OLD HOUSES, NORMANDY.

indicating everything that to her was beautiful; falling into raptures as she gazed upon a coloured window that she thought fit for Paradise, and we, I fear, scarcely thought fit for earth. Then she escorted us through the grounds and up to the gateway, and delivering us over to the tender mercies of the porteress who had admitted us, made us a deep reverence and went her way: first asking us if we would not return that evening and attend the service in the chapel.

But that was beyond our power, for we were not ubiquitous, and our charioteer was even then preparing for departure. Before another hour had struck upon the gong of time, we had said good-bye to St. Sauveur le Vicomte, to the Hôtel des Voyageurs, to Madame Cotigny and her unfriendly parrot, who saw us depart with fluttering of wings and a war whoop that would have done honour to a wild Indian, and every expression of joy that bird can be capable of.

"He doesn't really mean it," said Madame in lame apology; "it is only his way. As soon as you have gone, and we sink back into quietness, he will mope and be as dull as ditch-water. Is it not so, chéri?"

And chéri rewarded the caressing movement by making a grab at its mistress's finger, and bidding her as well as ourselves begone.

A few moments more and we had obeyed: but we had been so comfortable here, felt so much at home; Madame had, as it were, made us so much of the house; there had been so much peace and repose about our little sojourn: that we left with regret.

We were now on our way to Bricquebec, which was to be the extent of our journey. The aspect of the country did not change. The long, straight road was bordered by hedges, and the green fields lay beyond. The mile-stones upon the way alone marked our progress. We saw no villages; and this morning no pedestrians were abroad. At the end of two hours our driver pointed to a small town in the distance, above which a cloud of blue smoke ascended towards heaven. That said he, was Bricquebec. The sturdy little horse pricked up his ears at the word and quickened his pace, as if he knew that it was the extremity of his journey. In a very short time we had reached our destination, and found ourselves within the portals of a wonderful old inn.

For picturesqueness and antiquity probably it has not its equal in Normandy. It is called the Hôtel du Vieux Château, and it forms part of what was once the old castle. Very much of its antiquity remains, and its grey walls and mullioned windows have a classical, almost an ecclesiastical appearance. It dates back to the fourteenth century. The walls surrounding it are still tolerably perfect, and the square towers placed at intervals are of the eleventh century.

Just above the inn, casting its shadow upon the slated roof and athwart the courtyard, is a fine octagonal donjon-keep, sufficiently ruined to make it very romantic and picturesque. To ascend to the summit is a labour of love, and you are rewarded by a magnificent view. A great stretch of country, diversified by fields and hedges, dense woods, in which are many Druidical remains, *not* visible from the tower; a Trappist monastery some two miles without the town, to which we determined to wend our steps as soon as luncheon was over; a fair, winding river in the distance, which looked like silver in the shade, and like gold where it caught the flashing sunlight upon its surface. At our feet lay the small undulating, uninteresting town,

with few traces of antiquity about it, excepting the donjon on which we stood, and the gray walls, with their square towers, and the picturesque old inn that alone was sufficient to make the place famous; and the old church that is both Norman and Gothic, partly of the eleventh century, and partly of the sixteenth.

We came down the crumbling staircase of the keep, and entered the hotel, where luncheon was spread in a room that might once have been the castle hall. The whole interior was interesting. The kitchen was spacious and vaulted, and the chef presiding at a huge stove was substantial enough to have been an ancient baronial retainer. Upstairs there were long and gloomy passages and many rooms. What had once been great banqueting or other halls, had evidently been partitioned off into chambers for modern travellers. Nothing of the past haunted them but a ghostly atmosphere. It seemed filled with martial echoes of a dead-and-gone age; and one felt that a night spent beneath the roof would cause one's dreams to be haunted by the shades of a great crowd of soldiers in warlike costume, and by the clashing of arms, the clanking of armour, and much military pageant. The very boards would creak, and the wind would pass the casements with sighing, sorrowful sound.

But the luncheon was anything but ghostly, it was very real and matter of fact and unromantic; very substantial and satisfying; and we did full justice to it. What would you? We cannot live upon air in this lower world; and ruins, which are such a feast of reason and flow of soul, will do nothing towards satisfying the pangs of hunger.

After this we departed in search of the monastery, which we had a great desire to see. Why is it that these places have a certain fascination for us, so that we never miss an inspection when the opportunity offers itself? Is it that a certain sadness overshadows them? a certain mystery? and in all sadness and mystery there is attraction. Is it anxiety to test human nature, to learn something of a community of men who have withdrawn themselves from the world, with all its pleasures and temptations, and discover how the ordeal has worked, and what effect it has had upon the moral and spiritual natures of these recluses?

As a rule the result is disappointing. They become monks but not mystics: pain and sorrow and suffering you see upon their faces; often a discontented, almost despairing, expression; as if the life had somehow not quite answered its intended purpose; had missed its mark, and failed to bring that closeness to heaven which a life of constant devotion should inspire. Alas, these poor recluses forget that they are human, and that, whether in the privacy of the cell or in the crowded world, the frailties of the human heart can be battled with but never quite conquered until that heart has ceased to beat, and the soul has winged its flight to eternity.

So we also were attracted towards the Trappist monastery, and set out in the hope of being admitted.

It was a long country lane bordered by high hedges, and a perfect Slough of Despond. There had been some sharp rain in the night, and the soil was bad. But the longest lane comes to an end, and we presently reached the turning to the monastery. Soon we came to a large outer shed, where a monk sat on a low chair reading a book. He had lately been chopping wood, a small pile of which lay beside him. Like the others, he had probably taken the vow of silence; but we came upon him so unexpectedly that when we asked him the way to the entrance he told us to go higher up. His words certainly were few, and he seemed startled by the sound of his voice; his face was pale and his head uncovered; but he had no sooner spoken than he concealed his face in his brown capuchon, and returned to his breviary.

We went on. It seemed a large and important place, given up to industry. We reached the principal entrance and rang a peal which awoke the echoes of a quadrangle. In a few moments a monk opened the door and stood before us, also in cowl and cloak. But he had not taken the vow of silence, for he spoke readily enough. We asked permission to see over the monastery.

"It is the wrong hour," he replied. "In ten minutes they will all be preparing for chapel, and no one is then admitted."

"We have come from far," we pleaded, "and the present moment is our only opportunity."

"Enter," he replied in friendly tones; "I will show you all I can. But if you meet any of the brothers, do not speak to them. Here is my little room and my bed," he began, showing us a small apartment in the lodge; and it was far more comfortable than anything we saw in the cells.

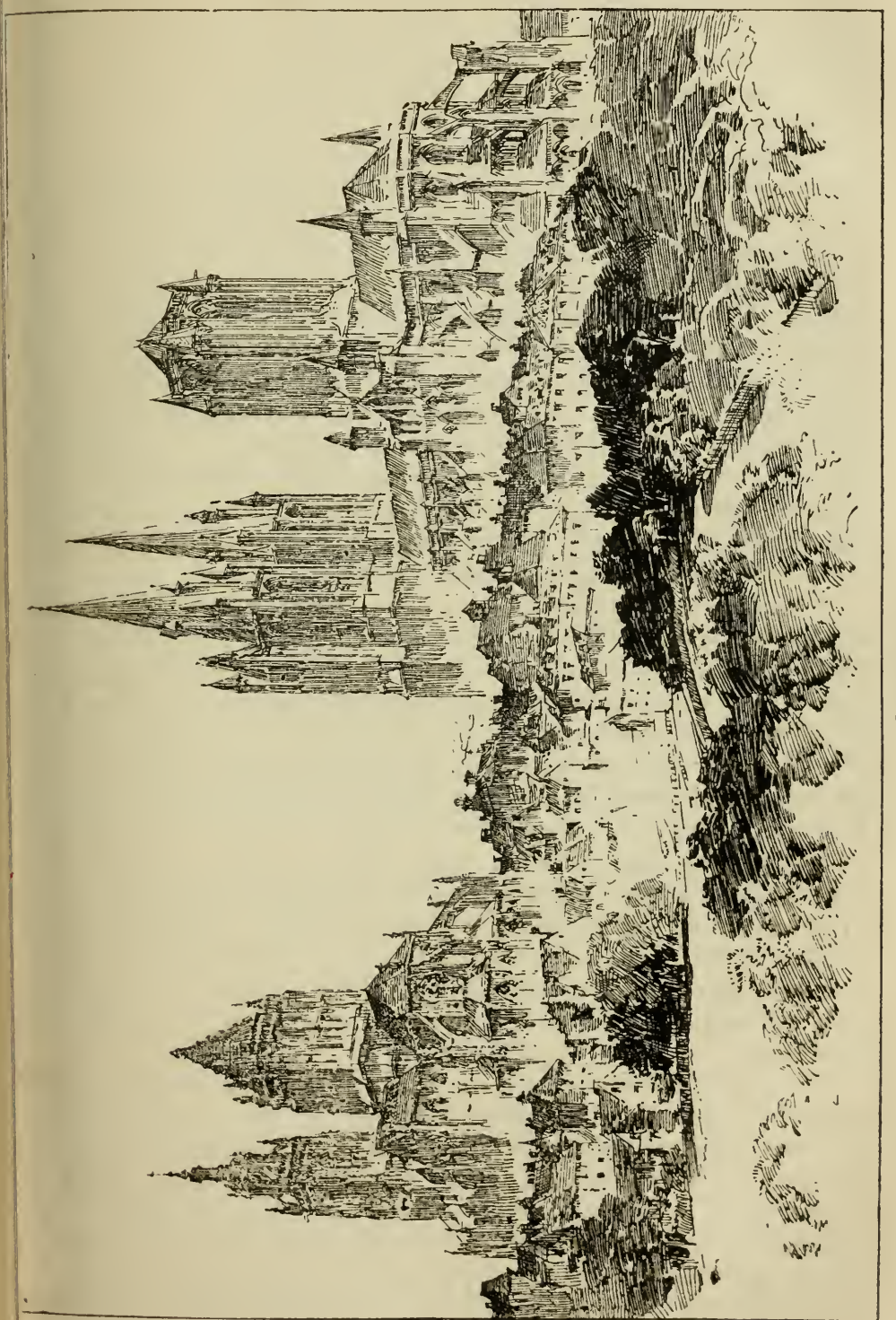
We began with the exterior, and soon saw what an industrious little world was within the monastery walls. There were endless stables for cows and horses, and styes for pigs, of which they had an immense number. They make cheeses here, and send them to all parts of France; but no one is allowed to see the process, and the secret is carefully guarded. Once it had nearly escaped them. A visitor went in apparently out of curiosity, but in reality to learn the art. He had nearly succeeded in doing so, when something betrayed him. He was expelled, and after that day visitors were never admitted into the cheese factory.

We saw great stones for crushing the apples that made the cyder; and everything was built on the best and most approved principle.

Then we went within the monastery, and the brother who conducted us was kindly oblivious of the fact that the ten minutes had more than expired.

Again we saw the long, silent, whitewashed corridors, with which all who have visited many monasteries are familiar. About the corridors cowled monks were lingering as if waiting for an hour to strike.

It was not the hour for visiting, as our guide had told us, and so we were favoured. I have never seen such sad, cadaverous faces. Some



COUTANCES.

of them looked as if they had risen from their graves expressly to attend mass, and would return there as soon as it was over. They

gazed at us for a moment, then bowed their head in greeting and turned away, each as we passed him.

We went on down the corridors, which really seemed endless. Here and there a door opened and a monk issued forth, and we caught a momentary glimpse of his cell, bare and comfortless. They flitted down the passages with noiseless tread, their bare feet protected only by thin sandals.

The rules are painfully strict. Absolute silence is one of them. They may not even ask each other for anything, but make their wishes known by signs. They wear no linen and sleep in their cloaks upon a hard straw mattress. The food is scarcely sufficient to maintain life. We went into the refectory, where their supper was spread. It consisted of nothing but a little dry bread, hard and coarse, a little cheese, a little oil for salad, a few vegetables and a little milk. Fish they never see, and meat is only allowed once a day when they are ill. They take nothing between four in the afternoon and six the next morning, and yet they rise every day at two A.M. We wondered whether any fainted from exhaustion during matins; but we no longer wondered at their cadaverous and death-like appearance. On fête days they rise at midnight, and nearly all their time is spent in prayer and meditation.

We went up into the gallery of the church, and looking through the curtains, saw some of them assembling. They entered by a small side door, and each one flitted like a ghost to his appointed place. We could not help thinking of the Grande Chartreuse in the Dauphiné Alps and a visit we had once paid there. How, attending the midnight mass, and looking on from just such a gallery as this, we had seen the monks gliding along in the darkness, each carrying a lantern which he placed beside him. What a weird, ghostly company they had formed; what weird, ghostly shadows their lanterns had thrown around, leaving the further end of the chapel in impenetrable gloom; what pale, ghostly faces we had gazed upon as they threw back their hoods and revealed their shaven heads. Yet faces and forms not half so cadaverous as these of La Trappe that we looked upon to-day. These indeed, we had never seen equalled.

We left the chapel, and on our way through more corridors entered a room where other monks were seated, also in cowl and cloak. All were studying, and I think our guide said they were still novices who had not taken the final vows. Amongst them was a young lad of sixteen or seventeen seated at a table, reading diligently. He took no more notice of us than if he had been carved in stone, yet we saw by his expression that he was conscious of our presence.

"Is he also going to be a monk?" we asked, feeling infinite pity for him.

"Without doubt," replied the brother. "But he has not yet taken the vows and he may withdraw if he pleases."

"Is he likely to do so?" we continued.

"No," answered the brother. "He will no doubt spend his life here."

Our heart bled for him. It was the saddest boy's face we had ever seen. There was a profound despair upon it we had seldom found on one four times his age. It was a fair face, and ought to have been laughing, frank and handsome. The eyes were large and blue, with the blue of the sky, for he raised them for an instant as we looked at him; raised them with a questioning gaze as if he would penetrate through his prison walls to the far-off heaven, and ask of it an answer to the mysteries of life that were too much for him. But the eyes that ought to have been so happy at seventeen were sunken, and the face had the death-like hue of the grave—the hue and expression that sat upon the faces of so many of the monks we saw that day. What was his secret? What the cause of his being there; of his renouncing the fair and beautiful world in life's sweet morning? Was it poverty? or loneliness? or a craving for solitude and retirement, that would certainly one day leave him, and bring in its place a life-long regret for the living death to which he had consigned himself? What could he know of life, of the world, of the human heart, at seventeen? The very sadness and despair upon his face proved his mistake.

He was dressed also in a monk's cloak, but the cowl lay back and did not conceal his fair head. As yet he was but a novice. And those about him, and older than he, would they not be merciful and warn him that his place was not there, but out in the world, where he might do battle with life, and rejoice in his freedom, and revel in the beauties of nature, the blue sky, the green fields, the flowering hedgerows, the free fresh air of heaven, the companionship of his fellows?

It was surely one of the saddest sights the world contained. We longed to go up to him and unloosen his cloak, and speak words of hope and encouragement, and take him by the hand and conduct him back to life and happiness. But we could not; this would not have been permitted; we were not even allowed to give him a word of sympathy. And so we turned away from a scene that was really heart-breaking in its pathetic misery. The door closed upon us, and shut them into a living tomb. But the face haunted us then, as it haunts us now, as it will ever haunt us when we think of that visit to that monastery of Notre Dame de Grâce de la Trappe.

We set out for the inn, and in doing so began our return journey. Two ways of reaching Coutances lay before us; one was to drive the whole way, by which means we should not arrive at our journey's end before midnight; the other to leave the carriage at St. Sauveur and there take the train, which would land us at Coutances about six o'clock.

We chose the latter, since we had nothing to gain by the longer

drive, nothing new to see, and part of it would have to be taken in the darkness, and the nights grew chilly. Our driver was soon ready to depart, and when we turned away we felt we were leaving a very lovely scene behind us, and such an hostelry as we should not meet again.

The drive back to St. Sauveur was uneventful. As we passed through the little town we caught sight of Madame Cotigny having a passage

ABBEY OF HAMBYE.

at arms with her parrot. Perhaps the daring creature had been rude to some fresh arrival; or possibly it had repaid Madame's confidence and affection with a grip in which there was too much earnestness. We did not know, and we did not wait to enquire. We passed with a clatter up the long straight street that led to the station, and soon were steaming away towards Coutances. Steaming very leisurely at the rate of about five miles an hour, with a ten or fifteen minutes' pause at the different stations.

But it came to an end at last, and we found ourselves struggling up the steeps of Coutances in the heavy, lumbering hotel omnibus,

which was built upon narrow principles that permitted people neither to get in nor to get out. It was, however, the only "narrow" thing about the hotel, which is conducted in a broad and liberal spirit. And when we stopped before its hospitable portals, monsieur and madame came out and welcomed us as if we had been "enfants de la maison." All this adds to the pleasure and happiness of travel; it will make a difference to our lives when the end comes; it helps a little to surround each day with a rose-coloured atmosphere: and each day is a little life in itself.

We still had half-an-hour's leisure before dinner, and we made straight for the Cathedral. It looked magnificent in the gathering gloom; a thing of beauty and mystery and intensity. Within, the aisles were in deep shadow, darkness was falling. There were a few kneeling figures about, motionless as the images before which they told their beads; a few lights brought out the depth of the interior, making its immensity seem boundless in the gloom beyond; but no ray penetrated to the roof, where all was silence and darkness.

It was a wonderfully beautiful and impressive picture, and we sat down in the centre aisle and allowed its influence to fall upon us. All we had seen and gone through the last two days passed before us; but as we strained our gaze into the solemn darkness and gloom, from every aisle and arch there seemed to rise up the vision of a fair young face and a spoilt life, with the saddest expression that face ever bore: the face and expression we had left behind us that day in the Monastery of La Trappe.

EVENING

(*From Victor Hugo.*)

THE calm of evening falls upon the plain:
Here let us rest. The sunset gilds again
The old arch—silent skies lie over us.

A far forge answers to the Angelus.

God on the bell, man on the anvil, strike
The same key-note; and star and hearth alike
Illuminate. Our destiny is here,
In these two sounds—mysterious—austere.
They take the helm, my sweet! they point the way:
The forge says "Work"—the Vesper bell says "Pray."

C. E. MEETKERKE.

LILIA ALEXANDROVNA.

A Story of Russian Peasant Life.

By F. M. F. Skene.

I.

"Life, like the ice, breaks in unexpected places."—*Russian proverb.*

IN the heart of a great Russian forest, where numerous bears and wolves roam unmolested, there stands a lordly mansion, called by the peasants in the neighbourhood "the palace of the Barins" (masters). It is the abode of the noble family of the de Sarionoffs, who for many centuries have owned the vast estates of which the wide-spreading woods form only an inconsiderable portion. The nearest town—Kostroma on the Volga—is many miles distant, and in winter, when there are forty degrees of cold and the snow lies on the ground to a great depth for months together, the isolation of the inhabitants of the district from the rest of the world is absolute and complete. At present, however, the brief summer is still shedding a faint glow of heat over the land, and Kola de Sarionoff, the young proprietor, is standing on a long wooden terrace of the house, which faces the sunset, with his beautiful newly-married wife. Lilia Alexandrovna is of Russian parentage, and, according to custom, she is called by the Christian name of her father joined to her own; but her mother was a Greek lady, and from her she has inherited the classic loveliness of her exquisite features, the waving masses of soft brown hair, and the pure colourless complexion which gave her somewhat an appearance of delicacy. Kola had wooed and won her under the burning skies of Greece, and he is looking at her now with no small dismay on his fine handsome countenance.

"I cannot bear to think of your passing the long cold winter here quite alone, *doushenka*. If I had known such a trial was in store for us, I could not have dared to link you to my fate."

"Then you would have deprived me of the only happiness I desire," she answered, laying her charming head caressingly on his shoulder. "But is it quite inevitable, my Kola—must you go?"

"My sweet one, can you doubt it?—an order from the Czar! Do you not know that to disobey it would mean Siberia for life, if not death?"

She shuddered, as she replied quickly:

"Ah, then, love, do not hesitate; go at once, to-morrow, as you have arranged. After all, it will only be a separation of six months. You said this exploring expedition to South Africa, on which he sends you, will not last longer, and that is nothing compared with the terrible risks of which you speak."

"No, that is true; but it will seem to me unbearably long all the same. Are you sure, Lilia, that you will not regret having elected to stay here instead of going back to Athens, among your old friends, till I can claim you?"

"Oh no, Kola; it will be my best consolation in your absence to be in your own home, and do what I can for your poor peasants, who interest me very much. They are such strange, simple-minded people, and many of their customs are so very curious."

The young man looked down on the park which surrounded the house, where the beautiful tall birch trees, with their silver-white trunks and light leaves ever trembling, were now also covered with shining red berries: his gaze passed on the railing enclosing the whole, painted in yellow, black, and red, the de Sarionoff colours; and from thence to the bright cupolas of the village church, surmounted by golden crosses, which could just be seen from where they stood.

"Well, my Lilia," he said, "you may walk safely to the Isbas (cottages) as long as the summer weather continues, but in winter you must only go in a sledge over the snow, and never beyond the outskirts of the forest, for the wolves become very savage with hunger then, and it is most dangerous to meet them. They actually come close to our house at night. I have heard them howling for hours together."

"But I shall be safe within these thick walls," said Lilia, cheerfully, anxious to reassure her husband, whose depression of spirits was evidently very great. "I am a brave châtelaine; you cannot frighten me ——"

"You cannot frighten me," echoed a peculiarly high, shrill voice, which was certainly not that of a human being, though the words were perfectly distinct. The young couple, looking round, saw a large grey parrot stalking solemnly towards them through the open window of the drawing-room, near which his cage was standing.

"There!" said Lilia, laughing. "You forgot that I shall have a most entertaining companion all the time you are away, in my wise Popka; and I expect he will afford me a great deal of amusement, for I have discovered that your peasants look upon him as an oracle who can prophecy the future. My maid told me yesterday that they are going to ask leave to come and consult him very often."

"Yes, I know," said Kola; "they never saw such a bird before you brought Popka here, and I believe they think he is a magician. You were not in the room last evening when some of the men who had taken too much vodki (brandy) at the caberêt passed through the park and stopped under the window to speak to the parrot. They waited some time till he emitted a few guttural sounds which I certainly did not understand; but the oldest man amongst them exclaimed at once, 'Come away, brothers; Popka says we are drunk and ought to go home.'"

"I am afraid Popka might often make the same remark about

your people," said Lilia, as she turned and went into the drawing-room with her husband; "that strong vodki seems to be a terrible temptation."

At that moment a servant came forward with the almost servile respect of manner which obtains among his class in Russia, and said that a young man from the village wished to see the Barin.

He was desired to usher him in at once. Lilia sat down with her parrot, which had been her favourite since her childhood, perched on her wrist, while Kola advanced to meet his tenant.

He came in—a tall, fine-looking peasant, about two-and-twenty years of age; his dark hair was cut short on his forehead, but hung in long locks over his back and shoulders. He wore a scarlet woollen shirt falling over his trousers, and high boots, and the costume was confined at the waist by a leathern belt. He advanced towards his master, and instantly fell on his knees before him, touching the ground with his forehead. In many Russian houses this customary mode of saluting a superior would have been taken as a matter of course, without any remonstrance; but M. de Sarionoff had breathed the free airs of more civilized countries, and never allowed this species of worship to be offered to him if he could help it.

"Rise, brother," he said, "you know how often I have told you that you must only kneel before the Lord our God." The young man rose obediently, and turned his large brown eyes with a very sorrowful look on his Barin.

"What is it, Harlano—you seem in trouble?"

"Ah, yes, Barin, a great misfortune—our little granary took fire last night, and is burnt down. All our provision of grain as food for the winter is destroyed."

"That is a misfortune, indeed," said Kola; "but I can remedy it, in part at least. I will give you money enough to replace your winter store."

"Ah! the Barin is good," said Harlano, stooping to kiss his master's arm and shoulder—the peasant's habitual token of gratitude; "but it is not all our grief. Misha, my father, was trying to save the grain last night, when the heat overcame him, and he fell to the ground in a fit—now he is dying."

"Let us hope not," said Lilia Alexandrovna, coming forward. "I may be able to help him to recover, as I know a little about medicine. The Barin is going away very early in the morning, but I will come to see Misha as soon afterwards as I can, and I will bring some good remedies with me."

"Gracious lady," said Harlano, bowing almost to the ground, "your coming will be like the feet of an angel passing over our threshold—but, with submission, I pray you not to bring any remedies with you. We would not wish Misha kept back from heaven now—my mother, Sacha, has washed him and dressed him for the burial,

and we have laid him under the holy *icons* (images) to die in peace."

"Nevertheless, if I can help him to live, I will, Harlano," said the lady, "you may tell Sacha to expect me very early to-morrow." The peasant bent profoundly before her in silence, once more pressed his lips to his master's shoulder, and went slowly out.

"The way in which your peasants regard death is the strangest problem in the world to me, Kola," said Lilia, when the man had gone. "Not only do they meet it with the most perfect calm and resignation, but they seem actually to welcome it and rejoice in its approach."

"Yes, that is so," said de Sarionoff. "Our moujiks (peasants) look upon death as a deliverance, sent by God, from all the toils and cares of their earthly life; if they see any hope of its overtaking them, they make ready for it with delight and alacrity by having themselves laid in the place of honour under the images, and they refuse all food or medicine. A stranger would certainly consider them devoid of feeling or affection if he saw them helping their friends to die as quickly as possible; but it is simply because they believe it to be the happiest and most desirable event that can in any way befall them. This belief can even overcome a mother's love for her child. I sent the doctor once to a little girl, who was in a precarious state, and he cured her for the time; but when she fell ill again later, he was not allowed to come near her, because the mother said she was not going to have her kept back in this weary world a second time."

"That seems almost incredible," said Lilia; "though it is true that the life of the Russian moujiks is terribly hard and degraded. Still, that even from the saddest home a mother would willingly see her child go down to the grave is almost more than I can believe."

"You will soon be convinced that their belief in the blessedness of death goes even to that extent, if you visit among our moujiks as you intend to do. I once heard a woman from a distant village talking to the mother of a large family among our own people, and telling her that there had been a great epidemic among the children in her district, which had caused them to die by hundreds. 'Ah, you are lucky,' our peasant said. 'God never sends us any pestilence of that kind, and our children all continue to live and thrive, unfortu nately.'"

"What an odious speech," exclaimed Lilia, shuddering; "such principles are really not to be tolerated. I shall try whether I cannot give your moujiks some better ideas during your absence, Kola. You see I shall have plenty to do."

She tried to speak to him bravely, but her heart was very sad through that last evening, and her husband's not less so, for he knew he should not see her beautiful face again for six long months. The parting came at a very early hour next morning, and Lilia Alexandrovna was left alone with the parrot Popka as her sole companion,

who was, however, destined to play a very important part in the history of the peasant village during the coming winter.

II.

"The steersman Time sits hidden astern
With dark hand plying the rudder of doom."

LILIA felt that her best solace after the departure of her adored husband would be found in taking help and comfort to the peasant family of whose sorrows she had heard the evening before. She was very soon, therefore, on her way to the village. It consisted of about twenty isbas or cottages, all alike formed solely of the bark of trees, which in time take an ashy grey colour; the front of each is pierced by three small windows and a low door, above which is a round hole for the birds to go out and in unmolested.

These cottages stand in a straight row along the road, but there is one rather larger, made, not merely of bark, but of planks, which is the house of the parish priest, who is always called *Batoushka* (little father). His church stands near on a little height; it is a beautiful sanctuary, built in the seventeenth century by the Sarionoff family, and is called the church of the Transfiguration. The services on Sundays and fête days are enlivened by really beautiful singing, for Russian peasants have a natural taste for music; but during the week the priest, not much more cultivated than his congregation, works in the fields like any other labourer.

Arrived at the door of Misha's isba, Lilia knocked gently, and it was at once opened by his wife, Sacha Tranova. She was a very handsome woman, her beauty heightened by the picturesque native costume. She wore a bright coloured handkerchief on her dark hair, a white undergarment with wide sleeves, over which was a long robe called a sarafan, held up by braces over the shoulders and secured immediately under the arms by a gay scarf; her feet were bare but for a curious flat shoe, made of strips of birch-tree bark twined together.

Bending low to kiss the lady's hand, Sacha begged her to enter, and Lilia walked into the one room of which the isba was composed. The walls of bark were lined with moss to keep out the cold air; a huge oven built of brick filled one side, on the top of which the whole family slept at night. A table and some wooden benches, with a box for the Sunday clothes, formed the whole furniture, with the exception of two or three icons, or images, placed in an elevated position near the low ceiling. They are painted on wood, generally with a nimbus of real silver round the head of the saint.

On a bench below these, dressed in his best clothes, the dying man, Misha, was extended, looking, certainly, very ill, but with a perfectly placid and happy expression of countenance. Lilia went up to him and took his hand kindly.

"I am sorry to see you looking so pale, Misha," she said, "but I

have brought you some wine, and a little nourishing food. You will let me give it to you ——"

"Oh, lady, no, I cannot take anything; it might keep me back in this toilsome world, and I am quite ready and prepared to go. I have had the Communion from the Batoushka; and have only to wait patiently now—God is sending me deliverance."

"But it may not be God's will that you should die yet, Misha—if you would only take means for your recovery."

"I know it is His will," he answered; "I have been called. Do you not know, lady, that every one whose time is come hears a voice that calls his name while he seems still in perfect health? I was called yesterday morning when I was quite well. I was out alone in the forest, and I heard a voice clear as a silver bell saying my name three times, Misha—Misha—Misha; then I knew my hour was come, and I was so glad. Take the wine away, lady; I would not live again for all the world; who knows what new sins I might commit?"

"Ah, lady," said Sacha, coming forward, "we have a warning here never to draw anyone back from death when they have been called. Look there," she continued, pointing to a very old woman who sat crouching on the floor close to the stove; "that is my mother, Zenobia. Eight years ago she heard the voice call her in the dead of the night, and was so rejoiced that her time was come! In the morning we washed her and dressed her in her Sunday clothes for burial, and laid her under the icons; and for five days nothing passed her lips—not even a drop of water, and she had got very weak and was nearly gone; but the Barina, your husband's mother, came to see her, and forced her to eat and drink; so that she got well and rose up again in this sorrowful world; and she has had eight years more of toil and misery and cold, and cannot tell even now when she may go. Ah, it was a cruel misfortune for her, though the Barina meant well."

"Yes, yes, lady," said the old woman in a croaking voice; "do not interfere when the voice has spoken. Leave my son Misha to depart: happy is he!"

Lilia saw it was in vain to combat their inveterate superstition. She gave the provisions she had brought to Sacha, saying she hoped the rest of the family would at least profit by them; and having taken leave of the serene, complacent Misha, she went out somewhat sadly. She strolled a little way into the forest, not venturing to go very far lest she should meet with a bear, as she had once done already when walking with her husband; and there, under a huge tree, her eyes suddenly fell on a young couple who, in their bright happiness, afforded a strange contrast to the sad scene she had quitted.

Harlano, Misha and Sacha's handsome young son, was standing there, with his arm round the waist of a very pretty girl, dressed in

the becoming peasant costume, and raising a pair of beautiful eyes to her lover's face. Lilia knew her well, and was aware also that she was Harlano's betrothed. She would not disturb them or interrupt the engrossing conversation in which they were engaged, and which prevented them from observing her; so she stole back softly behind the trees, and went home by another path.

Misha died in a few days, as was to be expected after a week of deliberate starvation, and was buried, arrayed in his finest clothes, in the little graveyard which surrounded the church.

About a week later Lilia Alexandrovna was sitting in her drawing-room with no other companion than her venerable parrot, whose reputation for consummate wisdom and a mysterious knowledge of the secrets of the future had become so solemn an article of faith for the peasants that they were wont to come every afternoon, on their way home from work, to sit in rows before the lady's window until it pleased her to bring out the wonderful bird, and allow them just to feast their eyes upon him, as she good-naturedly did most days. She had given an order to her servants that any peasant who wished to see her, and seemed to be in distress, was to be at once admitted to her presence; and as she sat quietly reading, the door suddenly opened and Sacha Tranova entered, showing unmistakable signs of being in violent grief. She prostrated herself on the ground before the lady, in spite of Lilia's remonstrances; and being forcibly raised, stood, with hands clasped and tears streaming from her eyes, as she poured forth her tale of woe and urged her petition.

"Oh, lady! lady! Such a cruel misfortune has befallen us! Harlano, my beautiful son, has received the order to go out as a soldier. He may not delay a day: he is to leave us to-morrow and go to Kostroma at once, to deliver himself up to the military commander. It is heart-breaking!"

"But, Sacha, you must have expected this to happen," said Lilia, gently. "You know that all the young men from the villages in Russia have to join the army or navy, sooner or later."

"Yes, but I thought he would be exempt because his father is just dead, and he was to have been married at the holy Christmas. His betrothed, Minodora, has come with me to implore your help. She is there, but she dare not come in."

Lilia looked up and saw through the half-open door a young girl shyly peeping in, and at once recognised her as the same she had seen in the forest with Harlano; but the pretty face which had then been so sunny and smiling was now bathed in tears and sadly changed in its despairing expression.

"Come in, Minodora," she said, kindly; "do not be afraid," and the sorrowful little peasant ran across the room and flung herself at her feet. "Ah, lady, grant our prayer," she said as Lilia raised her.

"But what is there I can do for you?" she answered. "I will gladly help you if it is in my power."

"We have come," said Sacha, "to entreat of you to allow us to consult the august Popka as to whether our dear Harlano will ever return to us. May we ask him, lady? You can see that he has listened to all we have said," she continued, glancing timidly at the parrot, who was sitting solemnly on his perch with his head on one side.

"Oh, certainly, you may speak to him if you think he can tell you anything," said Lilia, smiling; and the two women thereupon approached the wise bird with low bows and in the most deferential manner possible.

Sacha acted as spokeswoman, and in very humble terms begged the inspired Popka to tell them if their beloved Harlano would ever return to his home. Popka looked at her askance for a moment, and then croaked an answer which was quite unintelligible to Lilia, but which made Minodora almost dance on her little feet with delight, while Sacha raised her hands in devout thanksgiving.

"The saints be praised," she exclaimed. "The wise Popka has said *verniobsia* (he will return); we may comfort our hearts, Minodora."

"But why should you fear he will not return?" asked Lilia. "All soldiers are allowed to visit their homes after some years, are they not?"

"Yes, lady, if they behave well; but my Harlano is very high-spirited and hot-tempered. I have feared he would never stand the blows and hard treatment he will receive from his officers, as they all do; and you know if he were to rebel he would be instantly shot; but I have hope and consolation now, for the great Popka has spoken—he will return."

The two peasants then took leave of the lady, with many expressions of gratitude, telling her at the same time that the farewell service for Harlano would be held in the church of the Transfiguration next morning. Lilia promised to be present, for she had always admired the custom of sending out the young men who were called to be soldiers or sailors with a parting blessing.

At an early hour next day she went to her usual place in the beautiful church, where the batoushka was already intoning the musical chants of the Russian service. Then Sacha was seen advancing, weeping bitterly, and holding her son by the hand, while Minodora followed behind, pale and downcast. They joined in the rite with many prostrations when holy names were spoken; and when the service was over, the whole congregation stood up to see the solemn parting between mother and son. Sacha blessed Harlano with uplifted eyes, and made the sign of the cross over him three times, touching his forehead, shoulder, and breast with her right hand. He blessed her in precisely the same manner, and then they parted, perhaps never to meet again.

III.

"Green leaves and blossoms and sunny warm weather,
And singing and loving, come back together."

Four months had passed away, and the scene round the Sarionoff's palace was sadly changed.

It was deep winter now, nothing but unbroken tracts of snow were to be seen from Lilia's windows, and the cold was almost beyond endurance. Popka had betaken himself to the top of the huge stove, on which he sat moodily all day long, his oracular utterances being delivered in a very sulky tone. Lilia never left her well-heated rooms unless she heard of any distress or disaster among the peasants in the village, when she would summon up courage to drive there in her sledge, wrapt from head to foot in furs, with a hot-water bottle at her feet and another on her lap, while herself and her driver alike were covered over with thick blankets, leaving only their heads visible above them. In this guise they would skim over the surface of the snow, now many feet deep and hardened to the consistency of stone by the intense frost.

It was only, however, on some great emergency that the southern-born lady ventured out into this Arctic temperature, and such occurred one morning when her servant came to tell her that he heard there was some great tribulation in Sacha Tranova's isba, and although he could not tell what was the misfortune that had fallen upon them, he believed it was of some very serious description. This was quite enough to make kind-hearted Lilia brave even that terrible cold, and within an hour her sledge, with its pretty bells ringing clear in the frosty air, had stopped before the door of the peasant's cottage.

She disengaged herself with some difficulty from her heavy coverings, and told the driver to go home and return for her in an hour, as it would have simply killed her thorough-bred ponies if they had been allowed to stand even a few minutes in that atmosphere. She pushed open the door and went into the one room of the isba, which was quite sufficiently warmed by the huge stove glowing with heat.

She stopped, astonished at the scene before her—Sacha, Minodora, and even the infirm old mother Zenobia, were all prostrate on the ground before the images, while their voices rose in a chorus of wailing and lamentation which almost stunned her. The lady's entrance, however, effected an immediate cessation of their cries and prayers. They all three rose to their feet, not forgetting, in spite of their distress, to offer their customary homage by kissing her hand and shoulder, while they exclaimed that she was indeed an angel to have come to their succour.

"But what is the matter," said Lilia; "what has happened to distress you all so much?" The question called forth another burst of weeping from all three, mingled with some incoherent ejaculation

"Come, Sacha," said the lady, kindly taking her hand, "calm yourself, and tell me quietly what is grieving you."

The woman made an effort to control herself, but still quivered with agitation as she spoke.

"Lady, you know that for the past month there has been a brigand in the forest: he appeared one night in a lonely isba, killed the whole family lying asleep on their stove, and he has lived there ever since, going out by night wrapt in bear skins to plunder the cottages, and threaten to shoot all the people if they do not let him take what he will; he is so fierce and daring, like a very demon, he terrifies them all out of their senses, and a price is set on his head by the Government. He will be taken suddenly some day and executed; and oh, lady, lady, the saints be merciful to us! a man we know who caught a glimpse of him, says he is my Harlano!"

"Harlano!" exclaimed Lilia, "impossible; he would never be so wicked; and besides, of course, he is with his regiment in St. Petersburgh."

"The man said no doubt he had deserted," said Sacha; "it is what I always feared he would do. You know, lady, the life of a Russian soldier is very terrible, beaten and abused perpetually by his superior officers. Harlano is so high-spirited, I felt sure he would never stand it; and if he has deserted he could not of course dare to come here, where he would be arrested at once—perhaps nothing was left to him but to become a brigand, that he might not perish of cold and starvation."

"But Harlano was good," said Minodora, timidly.

"Yes, Harlano was a good, kindhearted young man," said Lilia; "and you ought to have a better opinion of your son than to suppose he could do this wickedness, Sacha."

"But the man saw him, and knew him," said old Zenobia, oracularly.

"He only got one glimpse of him in the dark," said Minodora, eagerly; "he might have been mistaken."

"Certainly he might; I fully believe he was," said Lilia. "I cannot think so badly of good Harlano. But the truth must be ascertained; that is what we have to do now, if it is in any way possible."

"Popka will know," exclaimed Sacha. "Do you think he would tell us, lady? They say that since the cold set in he has kept a rigid silence most days."

"It is nonsense to suppose Popka could tell you," said the lady, impatiently. "If only it were possible for anyone to reach Kostroma in this terrible cold, I would send a letter to be posted there for my husband's brother, who is himself a Colonel in the army—he could ascertain at once if Harlano has deserted, and even if he found it was so, he would not denounce him for my sake—he is in St. Petersburgh now, I know."

"Oh, lady, for pity's sake send that letter," exclaimed the three women in chorus. "Let us know the truth, even if it is to tear our hearts! Dear lady send, oh send, the letter."

"But how?" said Lilia. "There is no post here in winter as you know—and it is eighteen miles to Kostroma. The Barin would not allow me to send his horses or servants such a distance in this dreadful cold—they might die by the way and nothing would be gained."

Minodora suddenly came forward, her eyes sparkling, her cheeks glowing, and flung herself upon her knees before Lilia.

"Lady" she exclaimed, "I know a way by which the letter can be sent—only of your blessed goodness go home and write it—I will come for it and it will be taken safely. For the love of heaven do not delay; oh, write it—write it."

"But how can you send it, Minodora—do you know of anyone going to undertake that dangerous journey?"

"Yes, yes, I do; it has but to be written, and without delay. Lady, I hear your sledge bells, it has come to the door for you. I beseech you to go home and write the letter—in half an hour I will be at your palace waiting for it."

Lilia could only conclude that the girl did know of someone whose business might have driven him to undertake the perilous journey to Kostroma at that dreadful season, and, glad to help the sorrowing family, she got at once into her sledge and drove home to write to her brother-in-law, Colonel de Sarionoff.

She had only time to give him a full statement of the whole affair and to beg him, if Harlano really still was with his regiment, to obtain his discharge by the payment of the large sum of money necessary for the purpose, which she would restore to him, when she was told that Minodora was come, and awaited her orders. Lilia desired the servant to admit her at once, and the girl came in wearing high boots under her long red sarafan, and an enormous sheepskin which enveloped her from head to foot. It was in fact the skins of several animals, joined together. It was drawn over her hair and round the lower part of her face, leaving little more than her bright eyes visible through the wool.

Lilia gave her the letter, showing her that it was stamped, and telling her that the man who took it had simply to post it, and from Kostroma it would, even at that season, go safely to St. Petersburgh. "I only hope he will not be frozen to death on the way, whoever he is," she added. "I can hardly imagine anyone living long out of doors in this weather."

"God can keep the heart warm, lady," was Minodora's somewhat enigmatical answer; and with a low obeisance she went out.

It was not till evening, many hours later, that Lilia's maid asked her if she was aware that Minodora had gone herself to Kostroma with the letter. Poor Lilia was dismayed and terrified

beyond measure at these tidings, though she could not help admiring the young girl's self-devotion on behalf of her betrothed. "Oh, she will die, she will perish in the snow," she exclaimed, in much distress; "but we can do nothing to help her now; may God protect her." Then she added softly to herself, "I would have done as much for Kola!"

There ensued a period of cruel suspense for the peasant family, and for Lilia on their behalf. Minodora was an orphan who had lived for some years with Sacha, and, apart from the fact that she was to be Harlano's wife, the good woman loved her dearly. No tidings of her fate reached them in any shape, excepting that Colonel de Sarionoff sent an immediate answer to his sister-in-law, which was brought by a special messenger in a swift-running sledge from Kostroma. He said that he would at once make enquiries about Harlano, and would obtain his discharge if it proved that he had not been mad enough to desert; in which case his fate was sealed and no one could save him. He was certain to be taken eventually and shot, all the sooner if he had really become a brigand.

The fact that Colonel de Sarionoff had received Lilia's letter was a sufficient proof that Minodora had reached Kostroma alive, but it was not known till long afterwards that she was found lying insensible on the snow in front of the post-office. Apparently with a last effort of her failing strength she had placed the letter in the receiving box, and then had succumbed to the biting cold. She was taken to the public hospital and there remained dangerously ill for some weeks.

Lilia kept up a close correspondence with her husband, though her letters and his answers were a very long time on their travels before they reached their destination. She told him the whole story of Harlano and the brigand; and begged him, when he came to St. Petersburgh on his way home, to join with his brother in trying to trace the poor young man.

Meanwhile the atrocities of the forest brigand increased, and struck terror into the whole neighbourhood. The idea that he might be Harlano gained ground, and Sacha was in consequence shunned by the peasants living near her. It was a very dreary time for all concerned; and the first gleam of light on the darkness of their suspense came with the approach of spring. The cold was beginning to give way to some extent; and suddenly one evening in the dusk a sledge arrived at Sacha's door, from which Minodora sprang out and fell weeping into her arms. She had been sent home from the hospital by some charitable persons, and was very pale and thin; nor did she regain her blooming looks even in her home, for she, like the other inmates of the isba, was still consumed with anxiety about Harlano.

It was with inexpressible delight that Lilia saw the snow melting with the passing of winter, and the huge blocks of ice floating down the river; for she knew that with the first spring days her adored

husband was to return to her, having gained great distinction from his successful management of the exploring expedition in Africa.

Communication was once more possible with Kostroma and St. Petersburgh; and one blissful morning Lilia Alexandrovna received a letter from Kola, telling her to expect him on the following day, and begging her to summon Sacha and Minodora to meet him also in his house, as he was bringing them tidings of Harlano.

"Surely it must be good news!" they exclaimed, when they received this message, "or the Barin would have warned them to be prepared for the anguish they had dreaded ever since they first heard of the mysterious brigand."

They were at the palace, as they called the Barin's house, long before the hour named for his arrival; while Lilia, almost as early, was stationed at the window to gain the first glimpse of his approach. His dog-cart had been sent to Kostroma to meet him, as the roads were at last quite open; and when the first sound of the wheels was heard coming through the park, Lilia flew down to the outer door, while Sacha and Minodora stood respectfully behind, and Popka, perched on his mistress's shoulder, fluttered his wings as if sharing in the general excitement.

The dog-cart appeared through the trees; it came rapidly to the door and stopped. There was Kola de Sarionoff, browned by the African sun, and as handsome as ever. He sprang to the ground, and clasped his dear wife in his arms.

But who is this who, with one bound, has darted from his place beside the groom at the back of the carriage, and almost fallen on his knees before Sacha and Minodora? It is none other than Harlano himself, who is making pious thanksgiving to all the saints for the bliss of seeing them once more. Sacha, almost beside herself with joy, raises him up and holds him to her heart; while Minodora silently takes his hand within her own, and kisses it with passionate love. Even in the midst of her own deep happiness, Lilia does not forget to sympathise with her poor peasants. She turns round, holding her husband's arm, to look at the joyful group.

"Harlano!" she exclaims. "Then all is surely well?"

"Yes; he is not the brigand!" says Sacha, almost screaming with delight. "He cannot have been the brigand, or the Barin would not have brought him home."

"The brigand! No, indeed," said de Sarionoff. "How could you believe such a calumny of your good son, Sacha Tranova? Harlano has done his duty well in his regiment, and never left it till I bought his discharge, because your lady wished it."

"The saints reward your highness!" exclaimed Sacha. "But how, then, was the terrible brigand said to be so like my Harlano?"

"The brigand is Stepan Katow, a scoundrel who was caught by the gens-d'armes in the act of setting fire to an isba, where an infirm old man still lay, whom he had robbed of all he possessed. He is a

man the same height as Harlano, and with a slight resemblance to him. But it matters not who he is like: he has gone to his doom, and will trouble our forests no more."

"No more!" croaked Popka; and Sacha received this solemn assurance with even greater satisfaction than the words of her master.

A few weeks later there was a pretty peasant wedding in the Church of the Transfiguration. A picturesque part of the Russian rite is the holding of golden crowns over the heads of the bride and bridegroom while they follow the priest in a slow procession round the altar; and this duty is always performed by the most influential of their friends. It was considered in the village that extraordinary honour was done to Harlano and Minodora, because those who crowned them in the supreme moment of their lives were the stately Barin himself and his beautiful wife, Lilia Alexandrovna.

SONNET.

'Twas at the very birth of ancient time
That first the poet's endless song began;
The deeds, the loves, the joys, the woes of man,
He sang, unfettered yet by rhythm or rhyme.
And still he sings deeds fearful and sublime,
And love and death, and high and lowly things,
And peasants, emperors and kings,
All souls in clay—through every age and clime
The poet sings. Swift may run in his glass
His sand; he careth not; than death more strong
He knows to be that breath from God called song.
And evermore, in high melodious verse,
The glories of God's glorious universe
He sings to generations as they pass.

Julia Kavanagh.

A TERRIBLE APPARITION.

ONE day last summer, having nothing very particular to do, I sat down before an old cabinet and commenced looking over the papers with which the drawers were filled.

The cabinet had not long been in my possession, it having belonged to a maternal uncle of mine, who, dying recently, bequeathed it to me. He had led rather an eccentric life, seeing but little of his friends, and travelling a great deal about Europe. From time to time he would write very long accounts of his travels and adventures to a favourite niece. (I have prefaced what follows with these remarks, as I think they may help to elucidate it.) On nearing the bottom of the second drawer I came upon a good-sized account book, which on opening I found was filled with my uncle's handwriting. At the top of the first page were these words :

"I send you the enclosed account of an extraordinary adventure which befell me here in Lisbon about a week since. I have not exaggerated in the smallest particular what occurred, and I have committed it to paper whilst all the details are vividly before me. Not that I think for one moment they will ever fade in the least degree from my memory, but I thought it might entertain you and your brothers and sisters at the approaching time of Christmas. Please take care of it."

Having read this, I proceeded with much interest to read the truly extraordinary adventure, which, after some hesitation, I have published, feeling that lying here in this drawer it can divert none, whilst if made public it may help a few to while away, as it did me, a half-hour that otherwise would have hung heavily on their hands.

The manuscript ran thus :—

I forget whether I have told you in any of my former letters that the last time I was in Lisbon, I quite by chance made the acquaintance of, and became great friends with, our consul here. Amongst many other little acts of kindness and civility, he gave me last week an introduction to one of the smartest and wealthiest Portuguese families residing here. Little did he know that his well-meant act of kindness was nearly to prove the means of a misfortune well-nigh irretrievable in its consequences to me. I at once availed myself of the introduction by attending an afternoon conversazione at their palace.

This was followed the next morning by an invitation to a masqued ball the next evening. This I accepted, but was at a loss to know what costume to go in. I should infinitely have preferred going in simple evening dress, but was prevented from doing so by its being

stated on the card of invitation that all the guests were expected to come in masqued attire.

The time was short, so I determined to call on the consul and ask him about it. Accordingly to him I went, and by his advice I determined to go attired as a Franciscan monk. This he very justly observed would be a dress quickly obtained, and it also had the merit of being inexpensive.

It is now the fashion in Portuguese society to commence balls at an unusually late hour, so I was not surprised at the fact that I was not invited till half past ten. I determined not to arrive till nearly eleven, as I should then see the whole thing in full swing. The night being lovely, and the distance from my hotel to the palace of the Duke de F— being less than a mile, I determined to walk.

At about half past ten I set out, arrayed in my monk's garb. I must confess I felt a queer sensation as I glided along through the crowded streets with a pair of sandals strapped on under a very thin pair of slippers. I fancied everyone eyed me suspiciously, and altogether I did not feel at my ease in my newly-assumed character. I quickened my pace and presently turned into a badly-lit square, so common in all large foreign towns. I passed up one side of it, but was in some little doubt which corner I ought to go out at. I paused for a moment to consider, and seeing a tall figure approaching determined to enquire of it my way. When it got close to me I saw it was that of a man: he was enveloped in a large Spanish cloak, and had a big slouched hat pulled down over his face, completely hiding his features.

What was my surprise when on coming close to me he stopped, and looked eagerly at me for a minute from under his slouched hat. I asked him the way to the F—s' Palace, and he directed me in a voice which seemed full of agitation and grief.

To his directions he added these words in a peculiarly impressive way, "Be quick, you may yet be in time."

Before I could say more he had vanished into the darkness. How strange thought I: could he on account of my disguise have mistaken me for someone else? His directions agreed with what I thought was the right way, and in a few minutes more I stood in front of my destination, which was all ablaze with light. I rang the bell, and whilst waiting for admission I could not help being struck by the complete silence which seemed to pervade the huge mansion. Surely, I thought, most of the guests must have assembled by this time, and moreover, the dancing must be at its height. What then means this unearthly stillness?

My musing was now cut short by the opening of the great door by a richly-liveried servant, who, without demanding my name, at once ushered me into a large and very splendid room, brilliantly illuminated by a great many wax candles set in silver candlesticks and placed all about the apartment.

I was at first dazzled by the sudden blaze of light, and only perceived after a minute or so had elapsed that the room contained no one but myself. I looked round in astonishment; instead of the gay and laughing throng, there met my eyes the following curious sight.

In the centre of the room stood a low dais, over which was thrown a white covering made of some fine material and richly embroidered. Round it were placed a large majority of the candles. For a few minutes I stood irresolute, then, feeling sure the servant had shown me into the wrong apartment, I returned to the door, intending to recall him or find my way to the ball-room. Imagine my discomfiture on opening the door to find the hall through which I had entered in utter darkness. I took up one of the candles and made a close inspection of the various doors leading from it; all were securely fastened and completely baffled my efforts to open them.

I returned to the room and searched most carefully for the bell, but could find none. Once more I entered the hall and called aloud, but the mocking echo of my voice as it reverberated through its ample and lofty dimensions was all the answer I received. Alarmed and disturbed in mind, I returned the candle to its place and sat down. The hands of a clock on the mantelpiece pointed to half-past eleven. What was to be done? Must I spend the whole night in this strange abode of silence?

Suddenly a most curious and unaccountable feeling began to creep over me. You know I am a thorough unbeliever in the supernatural, yet I must confess this feeling was very akin to fear. It was a sort of consciousness that I was not alone in the room. Presently I found myself staring fixedly at that dais with its white covering. Once or twice before I had resolved to lift that veil and see what it hid, but my will was always stronger than my intention, and I did not approach it. Still I longed to know what was underneath, and that longing every minute grew more powerful. I fancied all kinds of things, but somehow or other my mind always came back to the idea that beneath there lay a human body.

Gradually I became so charmed as it were by its presence that I could not muster sufficient will-power to take my eyes off it for one instant. I imagined at last I could see through the white surface in front of me. I fancied I could see the rigid form of a corpse! Then suddenly a silvern chime from the mantelpiece announced midnight.

Did my eyes deceive me or not? With the first stroke of the tiny gong the covering began slowly but surely to move! Yes, it was gradually slipping to the ground, and from under it was gradually rising the form of a lady. What a spectacle did that form present! What a contrast of the living with the dead: of the perishable things of this world with eternity! She was richly attired, and was bedecked in a mass of the costliest jewels, which sparkled and flashed again in the bright light. Her face was as livid as a corpse's; her lips drawn apart enough to show a line of grinning teeth of pearly

whiteness; her magnificent dark eyes were wide open, and fixed in a stony stare on me; her hands, which were very slender, were slightly raised, and the tips of all the fingers were curved inwards.

No wonder I shall never forget that minute in my life when I faced that horrible apparition. I could neither speak nor move; I was paralysed with fear. There we were, staring at each other, as immovable as two pieces of statuary. Now that form commenced to rise from the dais, now it stood erect in all its ghastliness, now it began slowly to advance towards me. Suddenly my senses returned, a sudden instinct came to me; I sprang to the door, passed into the hall, and, banging the door behind me, felt for the key, but could find none. I turned and commenced trying to find an exit from the hall, but every door I found defied all my efforts to open it.

Presently I stopped and listened. Yes, that was a door opening, the door of that dreadful room, and those were steps advancing towards me. It must be that form approaching. Instinctively, I crouched in an angle of the wall; on, on came those stealthy steps, ever drawing nearer. Now they were within a few feet of me, I could see nothing, I was enveloped in pitchy darkness. All at once the footsteps ceased, it had stopped close to me, almost touching me; I dared not even draw my breath; half-a-minute, perhaps, which seemed an age, passed thus; then I felt a cold, clammy hand laid on my cheek. This proved too much for my already overwrought nerves; I gave one loud, agonised shriek and fell in a swoon. As I fell, I thought I heard another shriek mingle with my own.

The noise of those shrieks aroused the household, and on regaining consciousness, I learnt the following facts:

It was entirely my masqued attire which had brought me into such a disagreeable position. It happened that that very afternoon, a certain countess had died very unexpectedly. According to an old custom among great Portuguese families, the body had been attired in a rich dress, and decked with all the deceased's jewels, and placed in one of the reception rooms of her palace, there surrounded by wax candles to await her confessor, a Franciscan monk, who lived in a monastery in the suburbs: the monk's business being to watch and pray by the body all night. As he did not arrive at the appointed hour, the major-domo of the establishment went to fetch him. It was this person I met and of whom I enquired my way. The friar, whose place I so unworthily filled, was found murdered the next morning, having met his fate whilst on his way to the palace. The lady was of course, not dead, but in a kind of trance. She is once more the belle of this city, and first and foremost in every gaiety.

MISGIVINGS.

I WROTE a letter to a distant land,
Full of high hope and young expectancy;
It seemed the very stretching of my hand
To you, across the sea.

"My friend," I said, "will feel my fingers' touch,
Guess my eyes' glowing, catch my pulse's start—
You will not think I write a word too much,
Because you know my heart!"

And so I waited, satisfied and gay,
My letter speeding over land and sea;
One morning, "It will reach your hand to-day,"
I said; "think well of me!"

Then days stole by, and weeks grew one by one,
And you were silent still, as past they went;
And doubts crept up between me and the sun,
Marring my life's content.

Perchance the letter had not reached your land
Far distant? thus I questioned, sore perplexed;
Perhaps you cared no longer for the hand
I held you?—that came next.

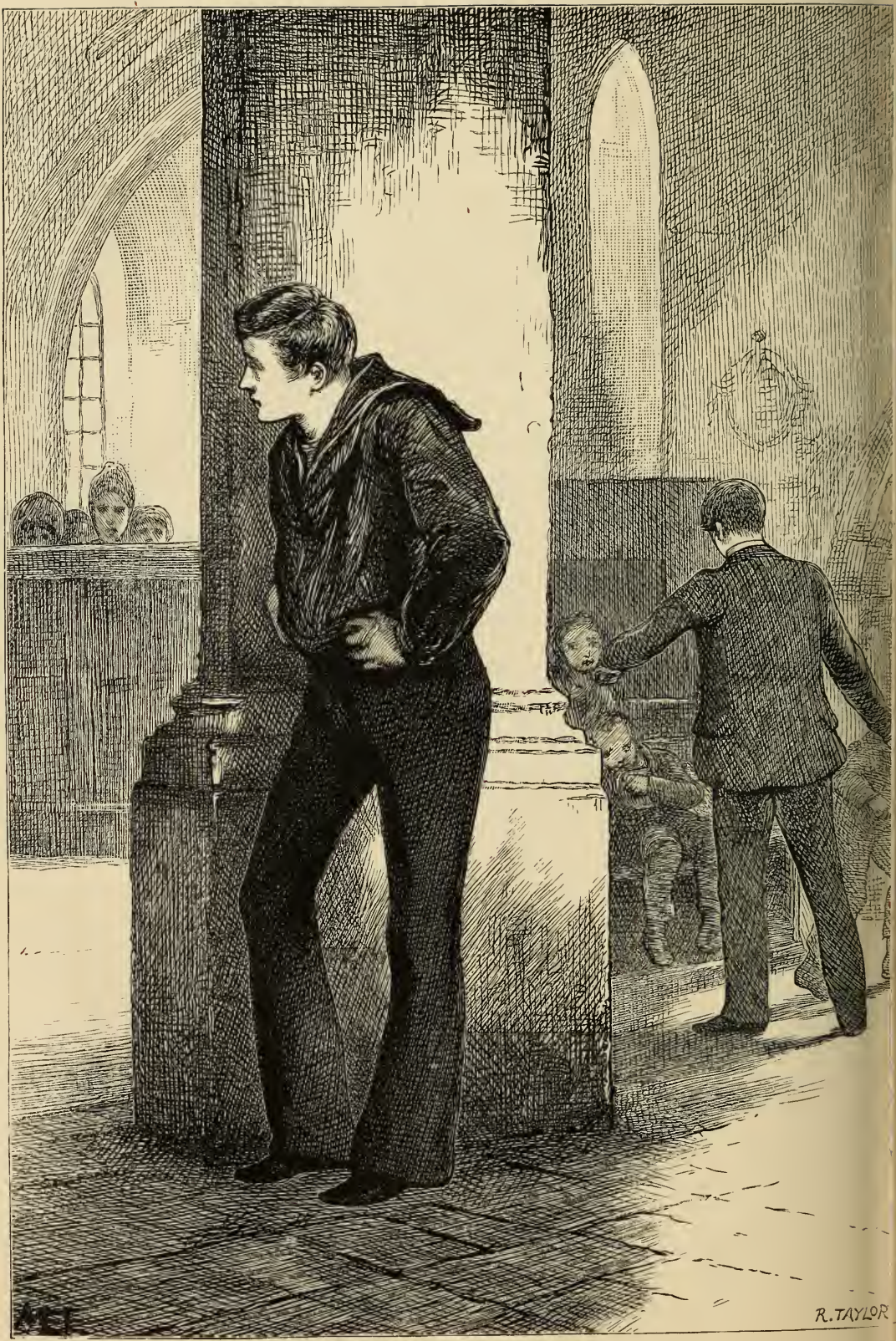
Perchance my burning words were wild and strange
To ears that might forget my voice, I said;
Then torturing fancy leapt to worse than change—
O God! if you were dead!

* * * * *

Lord, if it be Thy will to chasten me,
From Thine own hands I meekly ask the pain,
Let not my wretched, wavering soul be free
To plague itself again!

For all the while, to bring me answer due,
My friend was speeding over sea and land;
And my misgivings died at sight of you,
Coming with outstretched hand!

G. B. STUART.



M. ELLEN STAPLES. R. TAYLOR

HESTER'S ATTENTION WAS ATTRACTED BY A YOUNG MAN NOT FAR BEHIND, WHOSE GE
WAS FIXED UPON THE WEDDING PARTY WITH AN INTENSITY REMARKABLE TO BEHO

THE ARGOSY.

OCTOBER, 1890.

THE HOUSE OF HALLIWELL.

BY MRS. HENRY WOOD, AUTHOR OF "EAST LYNNE."

CHAPTER XXVI.

A CONFESSION.

EMMA had made her confession, and declared that she was married. Hester sprang from her chair. "Married!" But the word was a relief in that moment of wretched suspense. Then came the thought, was she wilfully deceiving her, or was she deceived herself? For how could a girl go through the ceremony of marriage in a country place without her father being cognisant of it, and he a clergyman?

"Do you doubt me?" returned Emma, in answer to her aunt's confused words, and there was a touch of scorn in her tone as she spoke. "We were married in Chelsbro' two months ago, two months this very day. Annie can tell you so. Here is the ring," she added, taking it from the bosom of her dress.

Annie only sobbed; she was in great distress; far more agitated than her culpable sister.

"How could you lend yourself to it, Annie?" her aunt indignantly asked her. "To join in concealing a serious step like this from your parents will be a reproach to you all your after life."

"I did not know it, aunt," answered Annie, the tears raining from her eyes. "Emma did not tell me for three or four days afterwards. It would have looked like ill-nature to betray her then, when it was too late to prevent it. I have never had a moment's peace since, for terror of its coming out."

"Which church were you married at in Chelsbro'?" inquired Hester.

"At no church. We were married at the Registrar's office."

"Then it is no marriage at all! It will not stand good," breathlessly uttered Hester.

"Yes it will," said Emma. "Marriage before the registrar is as legal as marriage in a church. I have heard papa himself confess it to be so."

"Married by register indeed!" cried her aunt, in her vexation; "I should be ashamed to think it legal. A barefaced, irreverent way of doing things! You might just as well have jumped over a broomstick. Annie, who is this man? Do you answer me."

"He teaches music, and he plays at the Chelsbro' philharmonic concerts, and copies music; anything in that way. He has the teaching at Camley, but that is not much."

"And earns what?" retorted Hester. "Fifty pounds a-year?"

"More than that, I believe. But still he is too poor to have asked openly for Emma."

"Too poor! Yet you have wilfully run your head into this imprudent marriage, Emma; this noose of sorrow!"

"Anyway, I shall be better off than being at home," was Emma's answer: and it struck her aunt that her effrontery of manner was only assumed to conceal her desperate uneasiness. "It is nothing, here, but worry and privation; work, work, work, from morning till night."

"How did you become acquainted with him?"

"We used to meet him on our road to Camley, and he took to bowing as he passed us. One day—Annie was not with me—it came on to rain hard, and he spoke, and offered me his umbrella, and walked without himself. We got talking of music. I told him how passionately fond I was of it; that I believed I had a great talent for it, but papa and mamma had never had me taught. Oh, aunt Hester," she continued in an altered voice, "when I reflect that I might have been trained in that delightful science, instead of passing my days at this horrid employment, or in domestic drudgery, I feel rebellious against everyone! I know I might be earning a good living now for us all if they had only let me learn."

Hester could not but feel there was some reason in what she said, for Emma had inherited her mother's talent for music, but in a more eminent degree, and her voice was remarkably fine. "To go back to your explanation," said Hester, coldly: "what was the next move, after the day of the umbrella?"

"I met him again; I was always meeting him; more frequently, it seems, when Annie was not with me than when she was. Then he took me to a concert at the Camley tea-gardens, and——"

"Took you *where!*" uttered Hester in horrified tones.

"They are respectable, Aunt Hester," interrupted Annie. "Very decent people go to them; not quite the gentry, perhaps. They are about a mile beyond Camley."

"Of course they are respectable," returned Emma; "quite enough so. And I should not care where I went, to hear good music. I went to two. He gave me the tickets."

"And Annie?"

"Not Annie. She was afraid."

"But how did you account for your absence, at home?" wondered her aunt.

Emma hung her head. "I was obliged to make excuses. They suspected nothing, and it was easy."

"Wrong, wrong; all very wrong. And you, Emma, a clergyman's daughter, to have made one at a tea-garden concert!"

"Oh, don't talk, please, about our being a clergyman's daughters," retorted Emma, in a spirit of indignation. "Aunt, it is a misfortune that we are so; it is the falsest position anyone can occupy. If we had been born in trade, we should not have had these detestable appearances to keep up that mamma and Aunt Fanny were always harping upon. You must not do this, and you must not do that, because your papa's a clergyman, a gentleman! And if we had been born rich, we should have received a proper education, and enjoyed amusements, and good clothes, and society. We may not associate with those beneath us; and our means (our dress, to go no further) have not allowed of our mixing with our equals, and those above us. We have been denied innocent recreation, for it could not be afforded. Our position has been a wretchedly false one, Aunt Hester, and when the temptation of getting out of it was laid in my way, I could not resist. I did strive: Annie knows I did: but it was too strong for me, that and the prospect of living amongst music; and I became Edgar Lipscome's wife."

"You unfortunate child!" uttered Hester, in her grief, "what is to become of you? How are you to live?"

"He made £80 last year," said Emma. "A great deal more, in proportion, for two of us, than papa's £150, with all its outgoings. Besides, he is teaching me music, and I shall soon be able to help him. It will not take *me* long to master the piano," she added, in a tone of conscious triumph. "We shall set up in some large town, perhaps London, and make a good living. I am not afraid: if you, dear Aunt Hester, will but be my mediator with papa and mamma now."

"I do not see much that I can do. The facts will bear no softening: rebellion, wilfulness, and deceit. Not to speak of the disgrace to a clergyman's daughter in making so disreputable a marriage."

"Cler— now, pray, Aunt Hester, do not, I say, return to that. It is just rubbish, and nothing else; sinful, false rubbish."

Emma's expressive word and tone reminded Hester of bygone years, when she had heard the same from her mother, upon very much the same topic. But Emma was much what Mabel used to be.

"If it is incumbent on a clergyman's family to maintain dignity and exclusiveness," continued Emma, "the Church should afford him pay accordingly. A clergyman's daughter, indeed! I tell you I would rather have been born a blacksmith's—anything. Think of the miserable struggle life has been to papa and mamma! It is sinful—I must speak out, Aunt Hester—it is a sinful system which condemns a clergyman to such toil and privation. Better be a Dissenting minister; better be a Roman Catholic priest."

"Good patience, child!" uttered Hester, when she could give vent to her astonishment, "where have you picked up such words—such notions?"

"We have not gone through life with our senses shut, aunt; at least I have not; Annie is tamer, and puts up with things. The mortifications we have had to bear as your boasted 'clergyman's daughters' would have opened them if nothing else had. I am glad that the step I have taken will be of some service to my poor father, since he will have one less to keep."

That night, when all were gone to bed, Hester sat with her brother in the parlour and whispered the truth. Never had she seen him so much excited, so much afflicted. Even his Christian spirit was not proof against the blow.

"Whose fault is this?" he exclaimed. "Can it be called mine? Apart from her own imprudence, her wilful conduct, do you see that blame lies with me and her mother?"

"No; the fault is her own. But *circumstances* have been against your children. The real blame lies with them, and Emma knows it. She said to-day she had occupied a false position in life, and she is right."

It is a painful thing to see a man weep, as Hester witnessed it in her brother that night. For the moment, nature had her sway; his submissive resignation was forgotten, the bitter feeling, for years so patiently subdued, was given vent to, and his sense of injury burst forth as a mountain torrent.

"It is an accursed system; it must be such in the sight of God. Why do they leave me, and such as I am, to toil and starve our lives out, and lavish their prodigal thousands upon others of our order, who are no better than we are, save in patronage? All the ills of my life have been brought upon me by this pernicious poverty. My wife's illness and early grave, the repression of my children's spirits, the blighting of their prospects, George's uncertain fate, and now this last blow! Look at my own incessant toil, my broken spirits and health! How dare they condemn us to a wearing life of labour, exact from us that we appear as gentlemen, and not give us the means to bring up and place out our children? Review what my life and Mabel's have been——"

It is of no use to record all he said: his wrongs were strong upon him. But it may be that had those high in place and power heard his words, as Hester did, they would deem it incumbent on them to set about ameliorating the condition of poor clergymen. Hester gradually soothed him round to the difficulty immediately before him: Emma's unfortunate step. How should he act in it?

"It is done, and cannot be undone," Hester observed. "Scold her as much as you will—and she deserves it—but see how the best can be made of it. I suppose it *is* a legal marriage, as she asserts."

"I shall marry them again," replied Mr. Halliwell, in excitement.

"No child of mine shall call herself married upon so irreverent a ceremony."

They sat far into the morning—Hester warning him when they parted not to say anything to Mabel that night. Could it have been kept from her entirely it would have been well, but that was impossible.

Impossible it was found to be. For the following evening Archie managed to betray it to his mamma. Poor little Archibald! he was the errand boy to the family, running and waiting on all, his dearest recreation being to sit by his mother's bedside. Mrs. Halliwell happened to put a question to him about Emma, and the child's stammering voice and confused countenance betrayed that there was something afoot which she did not understand. She demanded to know.

"I am afraid to tell," answered Archie.

"Archie! Afraid to tell *me!* Speak out, my boy."

"Oh, mamma! Aunt Hester said you were not to be told. I don't know it all myself; I only heard a little."

"You must repeat to me that little, Archie. I will inform your Aunt Hester that I insisted upon knowing."

"Emma has done something very wrong, very disobedient. It is about the music-master at Camley. I don't know, but I think papa is going to marry her to him to-morrow."

Of course these mysterious words were enough to alarm Mrs. Halliwell, and Hester was obliged to break to her the particulars. They shook her pitiably.

"Alfred is going to re-marry them," Hester said. "He has no option, unless letting the marriage by register serve. Do not distress yourself, Mabel. It might have been worse."

"Worse!" she exclaimed, "how could it have been worse? Hester, what are you thinking of? The girls have been reared in firm principles. No, no; it is as bad as it can be."

"Alfred marries them to-morrow, and then she leaves with her husband. We sent for him this afternoon, and he came, very penitent. I never saw a man so cowed as he was before Alfred."

"And you intended to keep all this from me!" exclaimed Mrs. Halliwell.

"No," answered her sister-in-law; "how could we keep it from you when Emma was leaving? But we were seeking a favourable opportunity of breaking it to you."

"What do you say his name is?"

"Lipscome. He is a mild, diffident young man, rather good-looking: fonder of Emma than she deserves, naughty girl, but with not half her share of sense and firm resolution. Emma will be master and mistress too."

"Why did he not ask for her openly?"

"He wanted to do so, as it appears, but Emma, and Annie too,

thought there would be no possibility of his obtaining your consent and Alfred's: that a clergyman's daughter (which, it seems, Emma hates the name of) would not be allowed to marry a poor music-master, struggling in his profession; and she would not let him ask."

Mrs. Halliwell clasped her white hands together, and lay with her eyes closed. "The same career of toil for her that I have had," she murmured, "perhaps worse. Yet what opportunity had our children of doing better?"

"Nay, Mabel, Emma and her husband may do well," said Hester, for she strove to make the best of it to the poor mother. "Both intend to put their shoulder to the wheel; Emma's talents are such as to make headway, and I have heard to-day that he is thought clever in his vocation. And there is one thing, Mabel, which really is a matter of congratulation—he is an excellently conducted young man; there is not a taint upon his character. All that might have been worse."

But still Mrs. Halliwell sighed and kept her eyes closed. "Send Emma up to me," she said; "and let me be alone with her."

Hester ran out, when tea was over, to buy some white satin ribbon to put on Emma and Annie's straw bonnets for the morrow, for she really did think it well to make the best of things, especially to the world. She was going along at a sharp pace, having plenty to do that night indoors, when, in turning out of the milliner's shop, she came right in front of three people walking abreast, and recognised the Reverend George Dewisson, his wife and sister, who were hurrying home to dinner. Perhaps the other two would have passed, but Miss Dewisson stopped. A regular old maid she was now, a trifle older than Hester. She had never forgiven Mr. Halliwell for marrying Mabel Zink, or Mabel for marrying him, and the rumours touching their daughter had not been unwelcome to her.

"Is it true things are so bad that Mr. Halliwell is obliged to marry them?" she asked eagerly.

"They are married, unfortunately, Miss Dewisson," replied Hester, turning her face away from the blaze of the gas lamp. "They were married two months ago, before the Registrar in Chelsbro'. That is the greatest reproach which can be cast at my niece, and we feel it as a keen one."

"Married before the Registrar!" echoed the Reverend George. "If that is only—au—their own assertion, I should receive it with suspicion, and—au—doubt."

"We have ascertained the fact to-day, sir," returned Hester. "You can do the same, if you please, for your own satisfaction."

"Why, we heard Mr. Halliwell was going to marry them to-morrow," exclaimed Miss Dewisson. "What stories people tell!"

"You heard correctly. Although legally a wife, my brother does not choose to let her go to her husband's home, really to enter upon her married career, unsanctioned by the rites of the Church."

"That's—au—as it ought to be," interposed the Reverend George.

"The register may serve for—au—Dissenters, and such people, but we don't recognise it."

"The affair—though of course most shocking and unbecoming—being less criminally bad than we had been led to suppose, you may acquaint Mrs. Halliwell that I shall resume my occasional visits to her," quoth Lady Lavinia, in a haughty, patronising voice and manner.

"I will deliver your message to her, ma'am," returned Hester curtly as she wished them good-evening and hurried home.

Hester had been guilty of a bit of innocent subterfuge. Finding the affair of the intended marriage had got wind, she told everyone, especially Tom and Sam, who were applied to as oracles by Chelson, that the time fixed for it was eleven o'clock. But it was at eight in the morning that Mr. Halliwell, stern and pale, stood, in his white surplice, inside the altar railings, and the wedding party ranged themselves before him. By these means but few people were in the church; otherwise there would not have been standing room, which would have made an unpleasant crowd for Emma, under the circumstances.

It was not so despicable-looking a wedding-party after all. The bride and her sister were in neat blue-and-white checked silk dresses, presents from poor Mrs. Goring just before her death, and their straw bonnets and white ribbons looked fresh and well. Hester had lent Emma her white veil of real lace, which, by accident alone, she happened to have with her at Chelson. The boys, called at six in the morning, and informed of the actual hour, were there, dressed in their Sunday clothes, and there also was Mr. Zink, the graceless Tracy of former days. A successful lawyer he was now, as important, in his own esteem, as George Dewisson himself, but very poor, for early extravagance hampered him, and "fast" habits still kept him down. He was there to give Emma away. She and Annie both cried bitterly, Mr. Lipscome was nervous and trembling, and the Reverend Mr. Halliwell read the service somewhat rapidly.

A noise in the church caused Hester to turn her head. Some urchins with their school-books in their hands had come into the aisle, and Jim was driving them out. Jim, as they all still called him, though he had long ago been promoted to the office of sexton and grave-digger. Hester's attention was attracted by a young man not far behind, whose gaze was fixed on the wedding-party with an intensity remarkable to behold. One arm was clasping a pillar, and he leaned forward, with—if Hester saw clearly—tears in his eyes. He wore a rough, large sort of cloth jacket and a blue shirt, like a sailor.

"Aunt Hester," whispered Archibald, who stood next her, and had also looked round at Jim's efforts for order, "see that rough man by the pillar. It is so like George."

"Like who, Archie?"

"George, who went to sea. But he was not brown, and his

shoulders were not broad and big like that man's, and George was a boy, and that's a man. Oh!"

"Archie, what?" for the child had clasped her hand tightly.

"He is smiling at me. Aunt Hester, do you think it can really be George?"

"I think it may be, Archie."

Just then the ceremony came to an end. The Vicar was leaving the altar to lead the way to the vestry, when Archibald, forgetting awe and time and place in this new wonder, went up to his father, caught hold of his surplice, and spoke aloud.

"Papa—is that George?"

"Sir!" was Mr. Halliwell's stern and reproaching reply to the child.

"It is like George, that sailor by the pillar, and I think it is George, because he laughed at me." And there was no longer any doubt, for George, seeing he was recognised, came forward and was clasped in his father's arms.

"Never comes a trial unaccompanied by a blessing," whispered Hester to her brother through her tears; "this will make up to Mabel for the shock of yesterday."

"Do you go and prepare her for it," he answered.

Mrs. Halliwell was half raised in bed, everything nice about her, for Emma and her husband were to pay her a visit before their departure, when Hester entered the chamber.

"Is it over? Are they married?" she asked.

"Yes," said Hester; "but I will tell you about it when I have spoken of something else. Mabel, I have just made a remark to Alfred—that no trial ever comes unattended by a blessing. You had a great trial to bear yesterday; there is comfort in store for you to-day."

"In knowing that she is married—I mean according to the rites of religion. Poor Emma!"

"Not that; something greater. Of all earthly blessings that God can send to you, think which you would best love to receive. You have a great surprise at hand."

"The greatest would be to see—oh, Hester! can it be? Is he come?"

"Yes, Mabel, dear; George is come; and here; and waiting to come up to you."

She broke out into sobs, and cried like a child.

Emma, with her husband, received her mother's blessing, little thinking it would be the last; and they departed in a fly for Camley. George did not leave his mother's bed-side till evening. It was dusk when he came out of the room: for the last hour they had been alone together. Hester, who was in the opposite chamber, saw him, and called him in. He sat down on a low chair, and leaned his head against the bed-post, sobbing.

"Come, George," she said, after letting him give way to it for awhile, "cheer up. Be more of a man."

"I shall never see her again," he said; "never, never."

"That, probably, depends upon the length of your next voyage," returned his aunt.

"No; it does not. If I were to remain, I am quite sure that very, very shortly I should not see her either. In a day or two she will be gone."

"You are mistaken, George. She has been like this a long while."

"Aunt Hester, I think we sailors detect approaching death quicker than landsmen. I have seen instances of it since I have been away. It is on mamma's face to-night, if ever I saw it."

"My dear, we will not discuss it. I believe your fears mislead you. When must you go?"

"To-night. But if I start at twelve it will do. Or," he added, as if in doubt, "say at one. I could catch it up."

"So soon! What port are you in?"

He mentioned one within a day's walking of Chelson. "I had only leave for a day and two nights," he continued; "and must get back before mid-day to-morrow. It ought to be before eight o'clock, but I'll risk it. I walked here in the night."

"George, the sea is a hard life?"

"Hard!—So hard that I will not describe it to you, Aunt Hester. And I am on a hard ship, in a bad service."

"I am sorry to hear it, my poor boy."

"The next two years may prove better than the two last. At any rate, they can't be worse."

"And what at the end of the two years?"

"Then I can pass my examination for officer, before the Board, and shall look out for a better ship."

"George, is this the life you would have chosen?"

He almost shuddered. "No. Some like it by nature: I do not, even with use."

"Yet you must remain in it?"

"I shall remain in it. When once a fellow has been to sea for two years, nobody on land would give him employment. I shall get along, aunt, in time. It will be different when I am first mate, or captain: I shall like it well enough then."

"George," said Hester, laying her hands on his two shoulders, "in all callings of life there are hardships, and there are blessings. Our care must be to fulfil our duty, whatever it may be."

He nodded.

"Our duty to our fellow-creatures in the daily concerns of life, as well as our duty to God. Always bearing in mind THE END, and living for it."

"Aunt Hester," he answered, somewhat impatiently, as if not caring to hear from her the precepts he had just listened to from more

sacred lips, "I have promised my mother to do my best *for* the end: and I will strive to do it."

Hester took a candle and turned away to go into Mrs. Halliwell's room, but George spoke to stop her: "Mamma said she would be alone for awhile." Nevertheless, Hester thought she would go in.

She was lying with her eyes closed, but they opened as Hester approached the bed. Her countenance was full of peace—tranquil, entire peace. But—was there a change in it? or was it the shade of the candle? Involuntarily Hester thought of George's words. "Mabel," she said, in an indifferent tone, not to alarm her, "do you feel worse?"

"No; I feel better. But I think I am going."

"Oh, Mabel!"

"I was permitted to last till my dearest boy came home: whithersoever we turn, Hester, mercy follows us: and now I can depart in perfect peace. If God's guiding care were not over him, He would not have brought him here to receive my dying admonitions; and I am content now to leave him in His hands—oh, so content!—for I know that we shall meet joyfully, all meet, at the Last Day."

Hester ran downstairs. She sent Archie in haste for Mr. Jessup, and then for her brother, who was attending a vestry meeting. Mr. Jessup could do nothing: he thought she was departing, but was not certain. Mabel was certain of it herself, and Mr. Halliwell went down to prepare the Sacrament.

They assembled in her room: the Vicar, Hester, and Annie. Annie brought word that Jim was sobbing in the kitchen, and hoping that he might see his mistress once more, so they called him up, and Mabel smiled and held out her hand to him. Poor Jim took it, and only sobbed the more. But there was something Mabel evidently wanted still, as was proved by her anxious glances towards the door. Hester understood them, and, after a minute's hesitating communing with herself, went in search of George.

He was still in the opposite chamber, sitting in the dark, where Hester had left him. "George," she gravely said, "we are going to receive the Holy Communion with your mother. Dare you join in it?"

"Oh, Aunt Hester! I am not good enough."

"I can see that she is watching for you—that your presence there would be her greatest comfort."

"We sailors do so many things that are not right, Aunt Hester: we swear, and do many other wicked things."

"As I fear too many do who are not sailors; and the very best of us are but bad, George," she continued: "none can decide this question but yourself. You no doubt do daily what is wrong; what are sins in the sight of God. But you are conscious now that they are sins?"

"Oh, yes."

"And are you truly sorry for them, and hope that you may be pardoned for them? Above all, do you earnestly wish that you could be kept from committing these sins, and that you might lead a better life?"

"I do earnestly wish it. I have been thinking over, in the dark here, all the sorrow I have caused her, and my heart is ready to break for it. I wish I could be better: more like her."

"Well, George, you know what we must do, and Who we must go to, to be made better," was Hester's gentle answer. "I will leave you here for a few minutes by yourself, and then I think—yes, I do think—that you may venture to come in and join us. In the hope, you know, George, darling, that it may give you strength to lead a better life, and to give comfort to your mother. We will wait a few minutes, and if you feel that you can come, do so."

Hester returned to the sick chamber, and soon George came stealing in. Mrs. Halliwell had held out her hand, with a pleased countenance, to Jim, but oh! the joyous grasp, the illumined countenance, with which she greeted George. She drew him close to her bedside, and held his hand. The clergyman went up to him.

"Do you feel you may be a partaker of this?" he whispered in serious tones.

The colour flew to George's face at the question, and he glanced at his Aunt Hester.

"Speak for yourself, George," she said. "According to the dictates of your conscience."

"I think I may, father," was the hesitating answer. "I hope I may."

Without another word the minister proceeded to his duty, reading some of the service for the visitation of the sick, and thence administering the Holy Sacrament. At its conclusion, Jim returned downstairs, sobbing still—he was a simple, affectionate-hearted servant—and the three boys came up—Thomas, Samuel, and Archibald. Hester has never repented of the part she took with regard to the sailor that night, and she believes it was acceptable to One higher than we are.

They gathered round Mrs. Halliwell's bed, and watched her leaving them. One hand still clasped George's, the other had sought her husband's. Poor little Archibald, frightened and tearful, had pushed himself in underneath his father's arm, next to his mother. Her death was one of peace, and so easy that none knew the exact time of the soul's departure. It was a little past twelve.

At one, George left. After he had taken his farewell, Hester went and opened the house door for him, and watched him across the dark churchyard. He flung himself down on the opposite steps, and gave way to his agony of grief, suppressed before the rest. Alas for the trials of life! How bitter at times they are to bear!

Hester remained for the funeral. The Reverend Mr. Dewisson

officiated, and a great number of persons attended it, unasked. Half the houses in Chelson were closed, for, if Mr. and Mrs. Halliwell were poor, they were widely respected. On the Monday following, Hester left for London.

"God bless you, Alfred," she said, at parting. "I say to you, as I said to George—bear on to the end. A few more struggles, a little more endurance, and it will cease for ever."

"Hester," he whispered, as he wrung her hand in his with a painful pressure, "forget what I said that night. I was wrong to give way: but the moment's sore anguish betrayed me. I beseech you forget it."

"And do you forget it, too," answered Hester, "for it is not worth remembering. It was no great crime, Alfred."

"Sufficiently great to need repentance. Fare you well, Hester."

And thus she left him to his hard labour and his discouraging poverty. "But I declare," cried Hester, as she took her last look of the damp vicarage, and the omnibus whirled her in its course past the luxurious residence of George Dewisson: "I declare that such a state of things is a disgrace to England's Established Church: that the heavy wealth lavished upon some of its members, the wretched poverty of others, is a shame and a sin, and I will declare it to be so as long as the system shall exist, though the whole bench of bishops should convene a court and hang me for it."

CHAPTER XXVII.

DR. GORING'S SECOND WIFE.

Soon after Hester's return home the school broke up for the Christmas holidays, and Hester departed for Middlebury, according to her agreement. As the account of Mrs. Goring's mysterious death was given in Hester's own words, it may be as well to give this short sequel to it in them also.

I had promised to go down to Dr. Goring's at Christmas, and I did so, getting there for Christmas Day. Matthew and Alfred had come home for their holidays, and were well, careless, and happy, as it is fitting schoolboys should be. Mary had grown, and was much improved, promising to be as nice-looking as her poor mother. As to my brother-in-law, he was quite himself again; had recovered his spirits and laughed and talked as before. These gay natures soon forget loss and sorrow, and perhaps it is best they should. One thing I was glad to find—that he had been prudent in his expenditure and was paying off his debts. Some shares which he held in a public company had suddenly risen to a high premium: he had been wise enough to take the opportunity of selling out, and had realised three or four hundred pounds by it. This assisted him well.

One morning, as we were seated at breakfast, the conversation turned upon a friend of Dr. Goring's, a schoolmaster, who resided in Middlebury. He had been a widower some years, but was now going to be married again to a pretty but portionless girl, and the town said it was quite a "love match."

"I did not think he would have been such a fool," observed Dr. Goring.

"In what way?" I asked.

"When a man marries in youth he commonly marries for love, and that's as it should be; but when he gets to middle age and wants a second wife, he ought to look out for money. Substance, not romance, should be the motto then."

Somehow I was pleased to hear Matthew say that, but I did not stay to ask myself why I was so. And just then the surgery boy brought in a note.

It was from a Mrs. Poyntz, asking him to call upon her in the course of the day as she was not well. Captain and Mrs. Poyntz resided about a mile from the town, and their name brought to my mind the Clutterbucks, old friends of mine, who lived in a farm-house close to them. I had not seen these friends for nearly four years, and I began to think, as I sat at my work, that I would go out and call upon them. It was a sharp, frosty morning, bright and cold; the two boys had gone out to slide, and I proposed it to Mary.

We found them at home, Mrs. Clutterbuck in the kitchen making pork-pies. The well-appointed, roomy old kitchen, where I had once, when I was a young girl, as fond of frolic as the best of them, revelled in all the delights of a harvest-home. Care had not come upon me then. They wanted us to stay the day, and Farmer Clutterbuck (he was always a joking man) hitched my bonnet off, for I was sitting with the strings untied, and gave it to his little grand-daughter to run away with and hide. But we could not remain that day, and settled to go to them another.

It was after one when we left them, and we set out to walk fast, for we dined at two. As we turned into the high road from the lane (Clutterbuck's Lane it was commonly called because it led to nothing but their house), I saw, about a hundred yards before us, Dr. Goring, walking towards Middlebury, by the side of a lady.

"There's your papa, Mary!" I exclaimed. "He has been up to Mrs. Poyntz. I wonder who it is with him?"

"It is Miss Howard," replied my niece.

I protest that a cold thrill ran through me from head to foot when I heard the name. How came *she* to be walking with Matthew Goring?

"Does Miss Howard live in Middlebury?" I asked, when I recovered myself. For, truth to say, I had never once introduced her name since I came down, I disliked it too much. "When she left us, Mary, she was negotiating for a situation in London."

"Yes, but she did not take it," replied Mary. "She has been in Middlebury ever since, staying at her aunt's."

"Sly cat!" I'm afraid I groaned to myself. "She has her eye upon *him*, as sure as my name's Hester Halliwell, and she stays in Middlebury to catch him. What does she do?" I questioned aloud.

"She goes out as daily governess," said Mary. "People say she and her aunt quarrel a good deal."

I went along at a quick pace to come up with them; for I did not like Mary to see her father bending to look into that false face with every sentence he spoke, as if he were—courting. The word must come, though I hate to write it.

Dr. Goring was surprised to see us: his countenance betrayed it. *She* did not seem in the least discomposed, but greeted us with a flow of words in her modulated voice.

"We shall be late for dinner, Matthew," I observed; "we had better get on."

He drew out his watch and looked at it. "Not at all late," he said. "It is only half-past one."

He did not seem inclined to walk faster, or to quit her side, and I did not choose to leave him in her society. So we slackened our pace to theirs; and thus it happened that we were seen walking into Middlebury side by side with that woman, who may have been the author of Mary Goring's death.

She turned off to reach her aunt's before we got to our street, and then I asked my brother-in-law whatever brought him walking with Miss Howard.

"I overtook her as I was returning from Mrs. Poyntz," he replied, "just before you came up with us."

I could not say anything to this, for I had no right to dictate to Matthew Goring whom he should, or should not, join in a walk and talk to, so I held my peace. But I know I was very cross at the dinner-table afterwards, scolding Alfred for upsetting the gravy upon the table-cloth—and the next minute I myself upset some ale.

When the holidays had expired, Matthew and Alfred went back to school, and I returned home. I did not go down again at Midsummer, for a pupil from India, of whom we had entire charge, was falling into delicate health, and the doctors ordered the seaside for her. So my sister Lucy, who was likewise wanting a little change, accompanied her to Ramsgate with Frances, and I stayed at home to take care of the house and the other pupils, five or six of whom generally remained the holidays with us.

We had resumed school about a fortnight, when I received a letter from Middlebury, from Mrs. Tom Halliwell. The following passage was in it: "Rumour says that Dr. Goring is about to be married again, to his children's former governess, Miss Howard."

Had a serpent bitten me, I do not think it could have injured me

as did those startling words. They were as I have quoted them, "*Rumour* says," but I instantly felt a deep, prophetic conviction within me that Charlotte Howard would inevitably be Matthew Goring's second wife. Could I do anything to prevent it? What *was* to be done? It was a union that ought not to be: I felt that, in my heart of hearts: a union from which no good could come.

"Lucy," I said to my sister, after tormenting myself for four and twenty mortal hours, neglecting my occupations in the day, and tossing restlessly on my bed at night—"Lucy, I have made up my mind to go to Middlebury."

"But think of the inconvenience, just as the school has begun, and we with several fresh pupils!" she urged. "If Matthew Goring is so obstinately soft as to go and marry that Miss Howard of all people in the world, I should even leave him to do it and to reap the consequences."

"So should I, if it only affected himself," was my answer. "But to give *that* woman authority over Mary's children! I shall start by to-morrow's train, Lucy, and you must manage as well as you can for a few days without me."

If I could have foreseen that that "few days" would be as many weeks!

I did not send word I was coming, but went in and surprised them; pouncing right upon my brother-in-law in his surgery. It was getting towards seven o'clock when I reached the house and astonished Susan. She said Miss Mary was gone out to tea, but her master was at home.

He was busy in his shirt-sleeves (it was an intensely hot day) over some chemical experiment. He held a glass of blue liquid in his hand, and his surprise was so great at seeing me that, in putting it down, he let some fall.

"Why, Hester!" he exclaimed, "is it you or your ghost?"

"It is I, myself, Matthew," I said; "and very sorry I am to come. Do you know what has brought me?"

"The train, I suppose, and then the omnibus," he replied, in his old propensity for joking.

I sat down on a low wooden stool. There was nothing else at hand, for of the two chairs one had a flat globe of glass upon it, and the other a glass syringe as big as a rolling-pin. And I took off my bonnet, and laid it on the floor beside me.

"I had a letter from Mrs. Tom Halliwell a day or two ago," I began. "She told me a bit of news, Matthew, and I have come down to see if it can possibly be true, and, if so, to endeavour to stop it."

"Indeed," he answered. But I saw, by the flush which came to his face, that he knew then, as well as I did, what I had to say: and I saw also that it *was* true; I saw it with a sinking heart.

"It is said, Matthew, that you are about to marry again."

"I am," he readily replied, as if in the last minute he had been nerving himself to face the subject boldly. "When a man is left alone with young children, as I am, Hester, it is a duty he owes them to give them a second mother."

"I don't see the obligation," I answered, "but we will not contend about that. If he does give them a second mother, an imperative duty lies on him to give them a fitting one."

"Of course," he acquiesced, rather restlessly.

"*Is Miss Howard a fitting mother for the children of your late wife, Mary Goring?* Answer me that, Matthew."

"If I did not deem her so, I should not make her such," he replied, that hot flush on his face growing hotter.

"Oh, Matthew, I could not have believed it of you!" I said, wringing my hands, for my perplexity and sorrow were pressing heavily upon me. "You, with your good sense, with your once deep love for your wife! You did love her, Matthew."

"Better than I shall ever love another, Hester," was his impulsive answer; "with a different love. We do not marry a second wife—in our advancing age—with the feelings with which we wed a first. And no second wife need expect it."

"Well, I did not come all the way down here to talk sentiment," I grumbled. "The whole world lay before you to choose from, the whole world: *how* could you choose Charlotte Howard?"

"Why not choose her, as well as anyone else?"

"*Why not choose her?*" I looked at him in astonishment. "Has she bewitched you, Matthew Goring? Has she taken away your proper sense—thrown dust in your mind's eye—deadened all decency of feeling? A woman whose hands may be stained with the deepest known crime, who was probably the destroyer of Mary Goring."

"Hester, hold your peace," he authoritatively interrupted, rising in anger from off the table, where he had perched himself. "I will not permit you to give utterance to ideas so disgraceful. How dare you couple Miss Howard's name with that of murder? If I were not sure that she is innocent of this, and any other sin, do you think I would attempt to make her my wife?"

"Do you remember what you once said about a man being a fool to marry at your age for love?"

"No, I don't remember it," he doggedly said. "But if you suppose I am over head and ears in love with Miss Howard, like a green schoolboy, you are mistaken. Though I think her a very charming young woman, there's many another I should like for my wife just as well as Miss Howard."

"Then why on earth do you marry her?"

"I hardly know how it came about, Hester. I have been with her a good deal lately—had got into *the habit* of being with her; and one evening, in a merry mood, I popped the question. I declare to

goodness, the words were no sooner out than I thought myself an idiot for my pains. Now you know as much about it as I do."

"You had better have popped it to me," I wrathfully answered, not caring what I said in my anger, and Matthew laughed.

"Because you would not have taken advantage of it. Well, she did, and the thing's done, so let us have done with it. But don't go fancying, again, that I'm spooney after Miss Howard. When a man's turned forty," he went on, laughing, "it is a cut-up to his dignity to believe him susceptible of that kind of nonsense."

"How can you have been so dreadfully blind, Matthew?" I ejaculated. "Blind to your own prospects and happiness?"

"Do you mean as to her want of money?"

"No. But a woman capable of flirting as she did with you in your wife's lifetime will flirt with others when she is a wife herself."

"I think not," he answered. "When once these women who are getting on in life marry, they sober and settle down. It is only the sting of neglect that causes them to covet unlawful admiration."

"Matthew," I said, rising from my hard seat, "can *anything* I may say induce you to put aside this marriage? I ask it for your daughter Mary's sake."

"Nothing," he returned. "I have made up my mind about it, and the marriage will be carried out. My word and honour are pledged."

"Had you any idea, during my sister's lifetime——Stay," I interrupted myself, "I won't say that, for I do not think of you so ill; I will say at the period of Mary's death, and immediately after it, did the thought, or wish, cross your mind, then, of putting Miss Howard into her place?"

"Never, so help me Heaven!" he earnestly replied. "Indeed, I took rather an antipathy to Miss Howard just then in consequence of what you said, Hester, that her propensity for flirting with me, or mine with her, or both, had given pain to Mary. If somebody had flown away with Miss Howard into the moon, and kept her there, I'm sure it would not have caused me a regret or a passing thought."

"Yes, your conduct together embittered the concluding months of your wife's lifetime," I uttered to him, "and, mark my words, Matthew Goring, *no good to either of you will come of this marriage.* I do not allude to any suspicion of a darker crime in saying this: let that lie between Miss Howard and her conscience; but when a woman has stepped between man and wife, has perseveringly set herself out to ruin their wedded happiness, and held at naught the work of God, who brought them together, no blessing can ever rest upon a future union of that husband and that false woman. No blessing, no luck, Matthew Goring, will attend yours with Charlotte Howard."

I left the surgery and went about the house, and found he had been making preparations for his new wife. The drawing-room was newly papered and painted, also his bed and dressing-room. The

old wardrobe with one wing had been taken out, and was replaced by a large, handsome new one, and there was a full-length swing-glass and other new and expensive articles which my poor sister had never possessed, and perhaps never felt the want of. This is often the case with a second wife, I have observed—as if men would make up in attentions what they cannot give in love. As I was looking round the room, Susan came in to turn down the bed.

"You have some new furniture here, I see," was my observation to the girl.

"Yes, ma'am. What with the whitewashers and painters and paperers, and these new things coming in, the house has been like a fair for the last fortnight."

"And what is it all for, Susan?" I went on. Not that it is my general habit to gossip with servants.

"Why, ma'am, master has not said anything yet, either to me or to cook; but we can't be off hearing the reports in the town."

"Well, Susan, you will not gain a better mistress, let her be who she may, than your late one." The tears rose to the maid's eyes as I spoke, and I respected her for that little mark of feeling.

"She'll be no mistress of mine, ma'am," was her remark, uttered warmly. "I couldn't bear her when she lived here, and I'm sure I'm not going to stand and serve her when she's stuck up into my poor mistress's shoes. It's not my place to speak first to master, but when he tells us of the coming change as of course he will do, I shall give warning. I wonder he has said nothing yet."

"Time enough, Susan, I suppose."

"So Dr. Goring seems to think," observed the girl; "but they say it is to be next week."

"What's to be next week?" I asked in tones that must have startled Susan.

"My master's marriage, ma'am. Dr. Ashe's housemaid told me so this morning, and she heard her master and mistress talking of it when she waited at table yesterday. Dr. Ashe is going to take charge of master's patients while he is away on his wedding journey."

"The Lord be merciful to us all in this world!" I muttered; "and his wife but a bare twelvemonth cold in her grave! Shame on Matthew Goring."

Susan left me to fetch home Jane. She had been placed (I forget whether I mentioned this) at a school in the town as daily boarder—going to it at nine in the morning and not returning till bed-time, so that she took her play and walking exercise there. We had thought it better when we were arranging matters after Mary's death. I went upstairs to see John, but the little fellow was in bed and asleep. Afterwards I went into the dining-room and paced about it alone, indulging all my trouble.

What extraordinary infatuation could it be that possessed my

brother-in-law? What did he see in Miss Howard to admire? I could not tell: I cannot tell to this day; or whether he saw anything. It is true she was always after him in the six months she had lived there (which had been six months too many) with her studied ways, her dark eyes, and her low, false voice. It is astonishing the amount of flirtation she got through in a day with those apparently innocent manners and quiet voice; and he had ever been ready to meet her half-way. And my belief is that if a blackamoor in petticoats, with yellow eyes and green teeth, were to hazard advances, some men would be found ready to make love to her. I once heard it remarked that Miss Howard was a "gentleman's beauty." Perhaps so; I don't know what their taste may be; but then how was it that never a one had come forward to secure the beauty for his own property? And what did she really care for Dr. Goring, although she did play herself and her charms off upon him? Not a bit more than she cared for me: for you may lay it down as an axiom that when a woman has lived half her span of life, her dream of love has long been over. But I think (and Heaven knows I don't judge by myself, though I am an old maid) that when a woman possessing a vain, worldly disposition, and of no principle, coveting the admiration of the other sex, eager for their society—I think that when a woman of this restless, undesirable nature gets past her thirtieth year without having been made (or perhaps sought for as) a wife, she grows desperate, and cares nothing what havoc she makes in the happiness of a man and wife. As she cannot boast of a husband herself, she desires, at least, to obtain their admiration in the sight of the world. This had been my opinion twelve months before, when I first found out the intimacy between Dr. Goring and the governess, and this was my opinion of her still.

I asked Mary when she came in how it was I had been kept in ignorance of this contemplated marriage: that it was her duty to have written to me, if no one else did.

"How could I write what I was not sure of, Aunt Hester?" she answered, bursting into tears. "Papa has said nothing whatever to me. But I heard to-day that it is very near."

"So have I heard it, child," I said, walking up and down the room in my sorrow. "Don't grieve, Mary," I added, as she continued to sob. "This is a world full of trials and cares, and God sends them only to win our hearts to a better."

"Aunt Hester," she resumed, stifling her tears, "do I look *very* young?"

"Young!" I said; "why do you ask that question?"

"I wish to go out as governess or teacher in a school—anything of that sort. I have been thinking much about it lately. Only I fear if people know I am but sixteen ——"

"My dear," I interrupted, "what nonsense are you talking now?"

"*Don't* force me to live with her, Aunt Hester," she implored,

with a sudden burst of feeling that astonished me. "I never can stop here with *her*, and call her 'mother.'"

"Do not fear, Mary," I soothingly said. "Before she puts her foot inside this house I take you out of it."

It was all settled that night with Dr. Goring. I sat up, tired as I was after my journey, till he came home at eleven o'clock, and I told him that from henceforth Mary and Jane must have their home with me and Lucy. "If you will pay us for their board, Matthew, well and good, for you know we are not rich," I said; "but if not, we will still take them and do without it."

"What ridiculous absurdity, Hester! The girls must remain at home. It is chiefly for their sakes that I am marrying."

"Is it?" I laconically answered; and then I related to him, word for word, the burst of feeling I had witnessed in Mary. He paced about the room, as I had previously done, with his hands in his pockets, and a contraction as of pain across his brow. With all his thoughtless folly he did love his children.

"What is the matter with you all that you should take this general antipathy to Miss Howard?" he peevishly broke forth.

"Instinct did it with me," I replied; "and a woman whose conduct with their father caused uneasiness to their dear mother can never be tolerated by any right-feeling children."

"There you are again, Hester, upon your ridiculous ropes! What could the children have seen of it?"

"Everything," I indignantly answered. "Do you suppose Mary at her age was blind and deaf? If I, unsuspicious as my nature is, saw so much in less than a month's sojourn, what must she have remarked, who was in the midst of it the whole time?"

I need not pursue the conversation. I won him to reason about the children, and it was settled that Mary and Jane should be placed with me in London. John, who was beginning to go to a day-school, was to remain at home, and Matthew and Alfred would spend their holidays there as usual. Otherwise, the house would be free for his new wife. He offered liberal terms for the girls; he was ever open-hearted; and he also offered to pay for Frances, but I would not accept for more than two. His marriage was really fixed for the approaching week. I was for taking Mary and Jane from the town beforehand, but he said I would greatly oblige him by remaining during the fortnight he intended to be absent, as he did not care to leave the house and the young child entirely to servants.

"Matthew Goring," I said, "I would not stay in this house to see you bring home your bride if you paid me for it in gold and diamonds."

"I did not ask it, Hester. You shall receive intimation of my return, and can leave a day previously." And I promised this.

We spoke about his pecuniary affairs. The quiet manner in which he had been living the last twelve months, with the proceeds of the

shares I spoke of, had enabled him to pay off the chief of his debts, and the three thousand pounds accruing from his wife's death was intact and placed out at good interest. He had also insured his own life for two thousand; so that, altogether, things were going on in a more prudent way than formerly. And for this I commended him.

Let no one say they *will* or *will not* do a thing in this world. As St. James tells us, we should add "If the Lord will." I had affirmed that I would not remain in Dr. Goring's house till he brought home his bride and yet when she did come home there I was. Circumstances had forced me to remain.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

MORE MYSTERY.

A FEW days after Dr. Goring's wedding (which you may be sure none of his family attended, though it took place in Middlebury, Miss Howard being married from her aunt's) the little lad, John, was attacked with sore throat and illness. It proved to be scarlet-fever, which was making its appearance in the town; but he had it very favourably, and I would not let Dr. Ashe write to apprise my brother-in-law, lest he should return in haste and bring *her* with him. Alas! the next attacked was Mary. The symptoms in her case were more violent, and the fever mounted to her head rapidly. I could not leave her; and so on the evening of Matthew's return, there I was.

When the fly that brought them from the railway station stopped at the door, I happened to be crossing the hall with a jug of lemonade in my hand for Mary. The man knocked and rang. Susan came flying along the passage to admit them and I flew away up the stairs. I could not have met her then with words of welcome.

"Susan, Susan," I said, calling softly after the maid, "tell your master of Miss Mary's illness; that I am still here; and ask him to come to her room."

I heard the girl open the door; I heard some luggage placed in the hall, and I heard Miss Howard's voice, speaking to Susan. I shut myself into Mary's room, and sitting down on a chair burst into an agony of sobs like a child.

I listened to his foot on the stairs, and I stood up and dried my eyes and tried to look as if I were not crying. Matthew came in. He held out one hand to me in silence as he turned to the bed where Mary lay.

He stood looking at her. And I stood looking at him. Was it really my brother-in-law, Matthew Goring? Never did I see such a change in anyone. He was thinner, paler, appeared worn and haggard, and had a dry, nervous cough which seemed to come from his throat. That a fortnight should have so altered any man!

"Matthew," I said, going round the bed to where he stood, "what is it? You are ill."

"I have not been well ever since I left home," he answered, shortly. "Never mind. It's nothing. I see Mary is very ill."

"Dangerously so for the last few hours. Dr. Ashe has been anxious for you since mid-day."

"Send Susan for him, Hester. I must know exactly how she has been."

There was no necessity to send, for at that moment Dr. Ashe entered. After his departure, Susan came in and said Mrs. Goring was waiting tea. "Mrs. Goring," not "my mistress." Poor, faithful Susan!

"Bring me a cup upstairs, Susan," said my brother-in-law. "I shall not leave my child. Hester, do you go down."

"I have taken tea hours ago," I replied; "and if not—— Matthew," I broke off, "I expected to have been gone, as you know, before this night, but I could not leave Mary——"

"Thank you, Hester, for remaining with her," he interrupted, warmly. "Thank you for all your kindness."

"But you must not ask me to meet your wife as a friend and a visitor. I cannot take my meals at table with her—*her* guest. Do not be vexed at what you will deem my prejudice. Matthew, I *cannot*. For the remainder of my stay, Susan will bring what little I want to this room, and I will take it here."

"As you will," he answered, but in so subdued and mournful a tone that it quite electrified me. Some great sorrow had evidently fallen on Dr. Goring.

He insisted on my going to bed that night as I had been watching the previous one: he himself would sit up with Mary. It was late and I was leaving the room to comply when Mrs. Goring came swiftly up the stairs with a candle in her hand. *She* was looking well, younger, I thought, than she had been used to look—her mind, I suppose, was at rest now—and she was nicely dressed in a blue silk gown and wore a thick gold chain of starry-looking links round her neck and a watch at her side. His presents, of course, for she had possessed nothing of the sort when she lived there. She hesitated when she saw me and made as if she would have come to Mary's room.

"Don't come in here, ma'am," I called out in my antipathy; "you'll catch the fever."

Dr. Goring heard and, following me to the door, seconded what I said. "There's no reason for running into unnecessary danger, Charlotte. You will do well to keep out of this chamber," and the tone of his voice sounded, to my ear, remarkably cold.

"I am not timid," she replied, "but I will do as you wish." And with that she turned into their own room, and I heard her bell ring for Susan to undress her. When she was the governess she could undress herself fast enough.

I could not sleep that night; I was very restless. And once I stole out of my room and down the stairs, for I slept on the storey above theirs, to look how all was going on with Mary.

The door was thrown open for the sake of air, and I bent forward and looked in. I remember the scene now, as it appeared in the feeble rays of the shaded night-lamp. Mary was lying, as before, unconscious and tossing with fever, and her father had bowed his head down upon the bolster beside her, near to where he sat, and was sobbing; violent, heavy sobs, his manly frame shaken with the intensity of his grief. I heard his low moans of anguish, and I saw him clasp his hands in deep, deep sorrow. And as I stood taking in another glance at him, before creeping back to my own room, an idea dawned over me that his extreme emotion was not caused so much by the danger of his child as by some tender chord of remembrance of her mother, his once dear wife. Surely Matthew Goring was miraculously altered!

My niece Mary recovered, but weeks elapsed before she was able to leave her room, and I remained with her. Jane did not take it. All that time I never associated with Mrs. Goring and, beyond some casual meetings on the stairs, did not see her. Susan, who consented to stay in the house as long as we did, brought my meals up to me, and Mary's when she was gaining strength. We heard that Mrs. Goring had anticipated, with much vain congratulation, the period when she should sit in her new drawing-room and receive the company who came to pay the wedding visits. If she had really done so, she was doomed to disappointment, for not a soul came near the place; they were afraid of the fever. But as Mary grew better, her father grew worse: he seemed to have a continual fever on him, his cough, which had turned to a very bad one, harassed him much, and he was worn to a shadow. His spirits were fearfully depressed: heavy sighs would burst from him; and Susan said that when at meals with Mrs. Goring he would sit and never speak unless she spoke to him. One morning as I watched him panting in his chair, after one of these fits of coughing, and saw the perspiration on his pale forehead, and marked his laboured breathing, a terrible conviction forced itself upon me that he was not long for this world.

I made some excuse to Mary, ran upstairs, hurried on my shawl and bonnet, and went out to see Dr. Ashe. I found him at home. I told him the symptoms I had observed in my brother-in-law, his apparent excessive depression and illness since his return, and I spoke of the fear which had that very hour penetrated to my mind, and implored him to tell me what was the matter.

"I really have not the power to tell you, Miss Halliwell," was the reply. "I see how very ill Dr. Goring appears to be, but I cannot fathom the nature of his illness. He never speaks to me of it, though I meet him daily, as I am attending most of his patients for him. It's as much like a neglected cold as anything."

"Is it not a decline?"

"More a waste than a decline," was Dr. Ashe's rejoinder. "He loses flesh daily. And he certainly seems to have something weighing on his mind."

"And if he continues to lose flesh, and cough as he does, and spit blood—"

"Does he spit blood?" interrupted Dr. Ashe.

"Susan said so the other morning. But to resume—if all these symptoms go on, and cannot be mitigated, what is his life worth, Dr. Ashe?"

"Scarcely a month's purchase."

I dragged myself back again: sorrows seemed to be coming thick and threefold upon me. Susan was in Mary's room when I entered it, and said her master was engaged in the dining-room with Mr. Stone, the lawyer.

"Susan says she thinks papa is making his will," whispered Mary.

"Oh, Miss Mary!" interposed the girl, "I did not quite say that. I said that Mr. Stone was writing, and master dictating to him, and that they were talking about wills when I took in the glass that master rang for."

It was an hour after that when we heard Mr. Stone leave; and my brother-in-law came upstairs. I opened the bedroom door, thinking he was coming in, but he turned into his own room, coughing violently. When the fit had passed away, I stepped across the passage and asked if I could get him anything.

"Nothing. Just step in," he said, pointing to a chair at his side, and down I sat. "Hester," he continued, "I don't think I shall be here long, and I am settling my worldly affairs. I trust you will not refuse to be the personal guardian of my children."

I could not answer at first, the words stuck in my throat, but I got them out at last.

"Do you mean that you have been making your will, Matthew?"

"Just so."

"I—hope"—I hesitated, and my heart was beating violently—"that you will not forget the claims of your children in the settlement of your property; that you will do righteous justice by them."

"Fear not, Hester," he whispered, clasping my hand with a hot, nervous pressure—"fear not that I shall forget the interests of Mary's children."

"Nor mine either, I trust," cried a soft, false voice, which made me start from my seat and Dr. Goring look round, as Mrs. Goring stepped from the other side of the bed, where she had been hidden by its curtains. "I am your wife now, Matthew, and, as such, have the first claim upon you."

"Hester! Mrs. Goring! justice shall be done to all," he uttered, impressively. "So far as it lies in my power and ability to judge."

"I beg your pardon, ma'am, for stepping inside here with my

brother-in-law," I said, as I shot out of the room. "I certainly did not know you were in the chamber."

However, I had an opportunity of speaking to him later in the day, at dusk, and he told me his plans for his children, but without hinting how his money was left. In every word he uttered there appeared to be a conviction that he should shortly be called from the scene.

"Matthew," I implored, "tell me what is the matter with you."

"I hardly know myself, Hester."

"You seem to have some terrible grief upon you since your return."

"I had had a grief, a sorrow," he replied, "and I believe it has preyed upon my bodily health. I know no other cause for my illness."

"You will surely tell me what it is?"

"I cannot tell you, Hester; or anyone. It must be buried with me."

"If you would speak of it, it might no longer prey upon you."

"Probably not—if I could. But I can't. It is of a nature that—that—in short, it is what may not be spoken of. I was wrong to acknowledge it."

I was silent, lost in conjecture, and Dr. Goring resumed.

"One word more, Hester, which will probably be the last confidential one I shall ever speak to you. At the time of my wife's death, I believe you suspected that I may have been the guilty party ——"

"Never, Matthew," I interrupted, "never for a moment. I knew you too well. Where my suspicions did lie I will not further allude to."

"I am glad you so far did me justice, but I doubted if you did then. I wished to assure you, Hester, on the faith of a dying man, who must soon appear before his Maker, that I was innocent of the crime, ignorant where to look for its perpetrator. Our babe who had just died was not more innocent and ignorant than I. I would have died myself to save her from it—I wish I had died in her stead, as she did. Mary—*my darling!*"

There was a low, passionate wail in his voice as he spoke the name. My heart was aching.

"It occurred to me as I lay awake last night, thinking—I mostly lie awake all night, Hester—that I would give you this, my dying asseveration, lest you should ever have doubted me."

"I never did, Matthew."

He would say no more, I mean as to the cause of his sorrow, and soon, very soon, before Mary was well enough to leave, there came a week of deep confusion and distress. Dr. Goring broke a blood-vessel; and ere Matthew and Alfred, who were telegraphed for, could arrive at home, he was a corpse. There was no time to send for

Frances, so she, poor child, never saw her father, dead or alive, after her mother's death.

We buried him by the side of his wife, in the very grave over which he had been hissed not fifteen months before. Mrs. Goring insisted on following him to it—with unseemly ostentation, it appeared to me, for it was not much the custom in Middlebury for ladies to attend funerals—walking herself next the body, and thrusting Matthew and Alfred behind her. Never mind! never mind! it could not, then, bring her any nearer to his poor heart, or estrange them from it. After they came home, Mr. Stone assembled us all in the drawing-room, and produced the will.

One thousand pounds were left to each of the three boys, and two thousand pounds between the three girls. The outstanding fees, when collected, were to be used in liquidation of claims against the estate, which they would considerably more than cover; and the furniture was to be sold, and its proceeds divided equally between the children. The other directions, for their education, etc., I need not mention, but only transcribe the clause which related to Mrs. Goring. "I give and bequeath to my wife, Charlotte Goring, the sum of ONE HUNDRED POUNDS sterling, in recompense of any pecuniary outlay she may have been put to in preparation for her marriage with me."

I stole a glance at her as Mr. Stone folded up the will. Her face was livid, as it had been once before in that room, when I had given her notice to quit her situation in the house as governess, and thought she was looking for something to hurl at me. And its expression—its evil expression! But it could do no harm now: and Matthew had, as I truly believed, made his will in the spirit of justice. Mr. Tom Halliwell and Dr. Aske were the executors.

We went up to London before the sale of the furniture and effects, which was set about immediately, Mrs. Goring having taken herself from the house in dudgeon the day after the reading of the will. I took all the children with me, except Matthew and Alfred, who returned to school. I also took Susan, whom I had engaged as housemaid, for I had grown attached to the girl, and Lucy had written me that one of ours was leaving. As we travelled up, a lady from a distant part of the country, who sat in the same carriage with us, happened to speak of a Miss Howard who had once been governess to her daughter. It was a singular coincidence, for I found it was the same Miss Howard, and an irresistible impulse came over me to ask why she parted with her.

"To tell you the plain fact," was the lady's rejoinder to me, laughing as she spoke, "Miss Howard had not been with me long when I found she began to think she had as much right to the society of my husband as I had. So I deemed it well to nip such an illusion in the bud, and discharged her without notice."

Then Matthew Goring had not been her first essay! But I never thought he had, by many. A painful query came into my mind: If

I had discharged her without notice the day I proposed to him to do so, would those children sitting opposite to me now be orphans?

We afterwards heard that Miss Howard—that is, Mrs. Goring—went to reside at a small seaport town in Devonshire. But whether to exert her talents for a livelihood, or to gain one, we did not know. I once wished that she, and all such as she, might do penance in a white sheet; but she probably carries about with her a different penance—her conscience. If so, it is worse than the sheet, for it is a penance that can never leave her by day or by night.

For myself, I am growing sad and sorrowful, and the guardianship of the orphan children is a heavy charge. I daily pray that a greater power than mine may aid me in my direction of them, and I strive to lead them in the right path. My old habit of losing myself in remembrances and conjecture gains upon me. I weary myself with wondering what could have wrought that mysterious change in Dr. Goring after his second marriage, turning him against his recently chosen wife—chosen with such persistent obstinacy—and leading him to the grave. And his extraordinary will, so full of marked slight towards her; what caused that? Mr. Stone told me, in the presence of the executors, that Dr. Goring gave him no explanation, but was short and peremptory as to that clause. An idea intrudes sometimes: was it by a chance word on her part he learnt that she was indeed the wilful instrument of Mary's death—did his mysterious words to me point to that conclusion—and was it remorse for his own blind wilfulness in taking her to his heart that was preying upon him? But if so, would he not have forthwith put her from him, there and then? It may be thought so. Would he not have brought her to justice? Unless, indeed, some chivalrous feeling towards *a wife* (for he had made her one) forbade it. Alas, if I weary myself with conjectures to the end of my life I shall never fathom it. The whole matter from the first to the last is one of those things that must ever remain a mystery. And I am glad my task of relating it is over, for it has been to me a work of pain.

(*To be continued.*)

GUIDO FONTANA.

A True Story.

CHAPTER I.

THE EVASION.

THE sun was sinking behind the distant mountains, flinging its long, slanting rays in golden sheaves upon the sturdy Pisan towers and the massive battlements of Cagliari. The glowing tints of the sky overhead were mirroring themselves in the sleepy waters of lagoon and sea, and a flush of colour floated upon the very air, which was heavy-laden with the perfume of aromatic plant and shrub. May was drawing to its close; the almonds, green, sweet and tender, hung clustering upon their leafy boughs, while here and there, in the more favoured situations, the early figs were already ripening.

The evening light fell red and glaring upon the penal establishment of San Bartolomeo at a short distance from the town, and even the barren plain around, as well as the arid rocks above it, were now wrapped in a garment of golden glow that lent a passing charm to their nakedness. The graceful pepper-trees lightly waved their lithe boughs, and the many-hued flowers in the convicts' little gardens raised their flushed faces to the evening breeze as it floated softly up from the gulf.

The buildings themselves—long and low and clustering together, with the air peculiar to all places of the kind—seemed to share in the tranquillity around. Scarcely a sound issued from the walls, though many of the barred windows were thrown wide open, and though in many of the courts the men yet lingered, awaiting the signal to call them to their respective wards.

A sudden chill spreads around, the flush fades from sea and sky, and then, without further warning, night reigns where day has vainly struggled to linger.

Up from the lagoon and the low-lying shore unseen, noxious vapours arise, steal over the face of the land, and scatter the germs of fever which, if once fairly rooted, baffle the skill of the ablest physician and the stamina of the finest constitution.

Nothing was heard save the cry of the night-bird from the gloomy crag upon which the lighthouse stands, or the uncertain call of a boatman from afar. Slowly the Pharo-lamps revolve on their nightly course; one by one the red fires of the night-fishers glare forth from their distant crafts and fling gory streaks upon the dark waters. The stars gaze silently down upon the scene now wrapped in darkness.

Within the building all was proceeding in its ordinary quiet routine. The men had been mustered and marshalled off to their respective dormitories.

Let us enter one of these on the heels of the warder bringing up the rear of the long line of prisoners who inhabit it.

A long, low room with seven strongly-barred windows in its length, three at its lower extremity.

Opposite the longer row a file of narrow beds—a couple of boards supported upon iron trestles, a straw mattress and a rug; in the centre of the apartment hangs an oil lamp suspended from the ceiling, and flinging yellow, lurid rays down upon all around. A small shelf above the head of each bed completes the furniture.

The three warders march slowly up and down while the prisoners undress for bed. Now and again they stop to exchange a word among themselves, or to address one or another of their charges. Here a facetious remark, there a reproof, as the case may be; for, on the whole, the best of understandings seems to reign between the guardians and the guarded.

Insubordination and oppression were of rare occurrence within the walls of San Bartolomeo. The convicts were, at the time of which I am writing, for the most part of the better sort. Nor was their life, comparatively speaking, a very hard one. They worked at their several trades within the establishment; and any proprietor of respectable character and standing could, on application and by paying a small daily wage, obtain their services without. It was a daily thing to see the convicts in their prison-dress busy in the service of the port, loading and unloading vessels, or at work with hoe and spade in the vineyards and olive gardens of the neighbourhood.

Always, of course, under the guardianship of a couple of warders; though these latter generally appeared to give themselves but little trouble about their charges. For evasion was difficult: not from the establishment itself, but from the island. Had San Bartolomeo been built upon terra-firma, many modifications in its administration would have been found necessary.

The prisoners are all in their beds; the warders make a last inspection; then, after putting out the lamp, they leave the place.

There is a jingling of keys, followed by the thud of a bolt, from without; the steps of the warders are audible upon the landing; they descend the stairs; the sound growing fainter and fainter, till, at last, they die out of hearing altogether. The prisoners are left to themselves till midnight. Then the round will come to see that all is as it should be.

In the first bed next the door lies a young man apparently asleep. In spite of the heat, he has drawn the covering close up to his chin, while his right arm, flung across his face, almost entirely conceals his features.

The long ward lies in what may be termed darkness, for only a

very vague light comes through the wide windows. For the night without is moonless, and, though the sky is free from clouds, the steadily burning stars can do little more than faintly illuminate the earth.

The moments glide on their way; the dull clang of the tower-clock proclaims to listening ears the flight of quarter after quarter; gives hoarse warning of so much less of life being left; finally rings forth, as if in anger, the death of the entire hour.

Within the ward nothing is to be heard save the restless turning of some convict upon his bed—the long-drawn sigh that betrays the deep and bitter yearning after days that have fled and friends that are far. The man in question, however, neither moved nor sighed. He lay there still as death. Motionless, but with a hell of conflicting hopes and fears raging within.

Hour after hour passed. It was only when eleven o'clock was pealed forth upon the listening night that he seemed to awake to life and motion. Slowly and silently his left hand and arm slip from beneath the covering to seek the garments lying on the floor at the side of his bed. Drawers and socks are stealthily put on. A momentary pause to listen. Then the man himself slowly gains the floor, creeps round the foot of his bed, dragging himself, reptile-like, across the pavement, and, at last, reaches a bunk not very far down the row, which, owing to its owner being in hospital, is standing empty.

Noiselessly he slips off one of the two quilts, then the bolster—then once more takes his way back to his own couch.

With a dexterity that reveals previous practice, he manipulates quilt and bolster into the semblance of a human form and places it in his bed. Then he draws the clothes once more up as before, gives a last touch to his work, and begins a second raid. This time, however, to more than one bed. Creeping here, gliding there, now stopping to listen, holding his breath, dragging himself forwards by his hands, wriggling, now under, now around one of the numerous beds, he noiselessly collects a pair of boots from one, trousers from another, a jacket from a third, until he has got together a whole suit, more or less, with which he returns to his own couch and deposits next it upon the floor. That done, he creeps beneath, and, with all the coolness he can muster, settles himself to await the appearance of the midnight round.

His heart beat almost to bursting when his listening ear first caught the sound of their steps outside. The bolt was withdrawn, the key grated in the lock, the door opened. Then the light of a clouded horn lantern flung its sickly yellow rays within the ward.

Three warders entered, one holding the light on high, and preceding the others down the long room. Most of the convicts were sleeping, or feigning to be so, and it was only rarely that a pair of eyes were opened, or a head raised to gaze upon the guard as they

leisurely made the tour of the beds. Near the further end they halted at the bed of one of the prisoners who complained of being unwell.

This moment was seized upon by our watchful hero to commence his desperate enterprise. His end of the ward was in comparative gloom, and the long line of beds stretched between himself and his guardians. Cautiously he slid over the floor. The space between him and the door was a short one; the keys were hanging in a bunch from the lock.

The moment was to him a terrible one.

Crouching as low as possible upon the pavement he dragged himself noiselessly over the bricks; he reached the door and raised his hand to turn the key. On the creaking or not of the lock, on the jingling or not of the bunch, life and liberty depended. For he had determined that he would not, in any case, survive the failure of his attempt.

Twice his hand is raised, twice withdrawn; then, with a bold effort over himself, he grasps the key and commences to turn it softly.

"Go and fetch some fresh water," said one of the warders to his companions; "a good drink will set him all right again."

The words luckily reached the fugitive's straining ear, a thrill passed through his frame, he shrunk into himself, as it were, and once more swiftly regained his hiding-place under the bed.

The warder passed out, and, be it carelessness, be it laziness, left the door ajar behind him.

This time, and without a second's hesitation, the prisoner, taking his boots in one hand, once more dragged himself across the pavement. But this time he did more: he noiselessly drew the door wide enough open to allow of his passing, slid out upon the landing, and reclosed the heavy portal behind him.

So far all was well; but it was only a small part of what yet remained for him to accomplish.

The landing was a wide one, and the stairs were broad; both were brightly lit up by a large lamp overhead. To the left a smaller staircase led to the floor above, while to the right a short corridor gave access to a kind of store-room in which a certain portion of the weekly provisions was usually housed. This corridor was in semi-darkness, and, for the moment, encumbered by a score or so of sacks of potatoes piled up within it. They had been carried in the evening before, but too late for storage, and had therefore been left for early removal next morning.

The great and immediate difficulty was to get clear of the prison. Once outside, a man, if unobserved, could easily make his way across the country in almost any direction. The establishment was not walled in, and the prisoner's plan was to descend to the lower storey, where he knew from examination that a bar in a certain

window would cede to the application of no very great amount of force.

The fever of liberty was upon him, the love of a devoted mother before him like a beacon; he felt within himself the energy and strength to wrench away not one, but ten bars like to the one he had discovered. But to descend the stairs until the warder who had gone down for the water should have returned was not to be thought of. He decided he would do better to mount to the upper floor, lie there perdu until the round had retired, and then run his chance.

One foot was already upon the stair when he heard a step coming up from below. Almost before he had time hastily to draw back, a voice from the upper storey cried out to the returning warder to know what was the matter. The reply was satisfactory, and the two men stayed to exchange a few words—the one upon the landing above, the other upon that below. It was lucky that they did so, for it gave the prisoner time to slip noiselessly into the little corridor and ensconce himself, as he best was able, among the sacks already mentioned.

Scarcely was he hidden, when the warder, with a can of water in one hand, a lantern in the other, appeared at the head of the stairs.

"Good-night," he cried to his companion overhead as he entered the ward.

"Good-night" was the reply from above, followed by the closing of a door.

"I did not know that Lippo slept up yonder," thought the fugitive, as he drew yet further back into his temporary hiding-place.

Lippo was one of the head warders, and, perhaps, of all the officials the one most feared and disliked.

The prisoner's heart beat painfully as he crouched there in his corner. Every second seemed to be clogged with lead. Would those men never pass? Were they going to stay there for hours? Would they discover the lay figure—the semblance of himself—occupying his otherwise empty bed? Would, by some unlucky chance or other, some article of the clothing collected from his companions be missed? The smallest event would be death to every hope—present and future. The plans that it had taken months to lay and mature might be broken and scattered in a single instant, dispersed like the leaves of autumn by the fury of the storm. His temples throbbed and his ears ached in the nervous strain caused by his striving to catch some sound from within the ward that might give a clue to what was passing there.

But not a sound reached him—nothing indeed reached him save the dim light borrowed from the lamp on the landing without.

But though he lay in semi-obscurity, that obscurity would avail him nothing in case of his being missed. The corridor would certainly be the very first place to be searched.

He ground his white teeth in anguish at the mere thought.

Guido Fontana was living years and years of life crowded into those few moments of incertitude and despair.

He drove his nails deep into the coarse sacking at his side; had he been able, he would have rent it as he would have rent away the uncertainty of the next few hours.

At last! The door was flung open with what appeared to him, in his fevered and excited state, to be unusual violence. It was as he had feared then? The next moment he was to be dragged forth an object of ridicule to one and all? For a prisoner who tries to escape and fails is sure of meeting with no pity from either guardian or fellow sufferer.

But no; one of the warders quietly locks the door behind him with a light, low laugh, and then both begin slowly to descend the stairs.

Never did woman's laughter sound sweeter to the ear of man than did that rough warder's cackle to the ear of the convict. He gave a deep sigh of relief, and half rose from his crouching posture.

The warders' steps were heard descending; they reached the landing below; there they halted. Their voices were audible in colloquy. In its highly strained state, Guido's ear had no difficulty in distinguishing the two voices; but, try as he would, he was quite unable to catch the meaning of their words.

Would they never go? And, alas, every moment of delay was an additional danger. Guido bit his nails to the quick in his terrible and utterly impotent impatience.

Suddenly a cold shiver seized him. The men were ascending the stairs once more.

Rapidly Guido retreated into his former hiding-place.

On they came, treading softly, as if desirous of escaping observation. They reached the landing. There was a short pause; then they entered the corridor in which the fugitive lay lurking.

The lantern they carried flung quaint, flickering shadows upon wall and ceiling. Guido heard the very creak of the ring as it swung from the forefinger of its bearer. He gave himself up for lost.

Then all at once a strange feeling took possession of him: a wild impulse urging him to anticipate matters and start forth from his concealment. He had a hard wrestle to resist it, and perhaps would in the end have had to yield, had not a word from one of the men arrested him.

"Ah, they will not be like those of my own country, you may be sure of that." The speaker was the Savoyard warder, Bal. And then: "How are we to get at them?" he continued. "The bags are all sewn up, for certain."

"Oh, we are sure to find a tear in one or the other if we search well," replied his comrade. "We can roast them in the kitchen ashes. It's long from now to daylight, and a man gets hungry on night service. Here, hold the light while I look for a hole."

To a certain extent it was an immense relief to Guido to learn that

it was not a prisoner, but potatoes, that had brought them back so inopportunely. Still his situation was a terrible one, and it would be little short of a miracle if they left the place without discovering him.

In a mood of mingled rage and despair he watched the lights and shadows dancing upon the ceiling overhead, according as the lantern was shifted hither and thither to aid the search which Bal's companion was actively prosecuting. Once, between the sacks, he actually caught sight of the man's arm in its holland sleeve, and a big, clumsy silver ring upon the index finger of his hand.

"Let's overhaul those next the wall yonder. I never did see a set of sacks so disgustingly whole as these."

"Better give it up altogether. The sacks are badly piled—a touch, almost, would bring some of them down; and if Lippo ——"

"Bother Lippo, I say. Ha, at last. I knew I should find one. Look. We can get as many as we want here. Now, stuff your pockets. Set the light on the floor. Yes—that's right."

Guido heard them pocketing their spoil. He felt, too, the pile behind which he was crouching slightly tremble once or twice, as if about to come down with a run. It didn't, though, luckily for all parties. But poor Guido had ample time to ascertain that their pockets must have been strangely capacious and their appetites sharp.

"There. Now, let me smooth out the void—so. They will think that the rats have been at them. And so they have—two-legged rats. There—now you've gone and done it. Quick—don't let it come down altogether—it would rouse the whole place."

One of the upper sacks had threatened to fall, undermined as it had been by the "two-legged rats," and it required all the skill of the men to re-establish it in its place. They finally did so however—Guido anxiously following their every movement. At last all was set right again, and, taking up their light, the warders retreated.

At last, indeed! Guido drew out his handkerchief and wiped the sweat of anguish from his brow. The immediate danger of being unearthed like a real rat was over—there was, at least, nothing of the ridiculous in those perils that yet remained.

"Mother, mother," he softly whispered to himself as he crept out of his hiding-place, "shall I then see you once more? Shall I then really see you again?"

With a smothered sob he turned to grapple like a man once more with the grim present—leaving the future to evolve itself as best it might. Down the wide staircase; across the lower landing. He enters the corridor at the extremity of which is the window before alluded to; he reaches it with stealthy step; pauses a moment to listen. Not a sound. Then, like springs of steel, his lithe fingers twine round the friendly bar. A nervous wrench. Nothing but a tiny shower of plaster fragments upon the sill. A long, steady pull—then another. The iron is considerably loosened. This time the

plaster tumbles out in flakes and falls upon the pavement. A pause and an anxious straining of the ear. Has he been heard? The same silence. Then another wrench, and the bar leaves its socket to be carefully laid upon the floor.

Guido passes his head through the opening and looks down. The distance is comparatively trifling: subtracting the length of body and arms, it will dwindle to a mere nothing. He mounts the sill, and, his boots hanging from his neck, slowly lets himself down. For a second he remains suspended by his hands—then quietly lets himself drop.

Ill-luck would have it that he should light upon a heap of shards, one of which cut his foot severely. A yet greater evil, however, was that his sudden descent among the fragments caused a clinking sound to ring out upon the surrounding silence. A window in the top storey was suddenly flung open, and a head and shoulders—those of the dreaded Lippo—sharply protruded.

"Who goes there?" he cried.

The voice rang out terribly loud into the night, and, for a moment, Guido felt his heart die within him. He gave no reply to the challenge which was once more repeated—only put on his boots with the utmost haste. "Who goes there?" again rang forth. The reply was a dark figure suddenly rising from among the weeds and rubbish and starting at full speed across the country.

Away through the brushwood—away over the broken rocks; on—on—on—hatless—panting—sweating at every pore—heedless of the cut in his foot—careless of the thorns that tore his flesh; mindful of nought save the thirst for liberty burning fiercely within.

And now the deep-mouthed alarm bell of San Bartolomeo rings out loudly upon the startled night, and the sonorous waves of sound float in ever-widening circles upon the darkness, proclaiming far and wide the escape of a convict. A gunshot from Cagliari responds to the appeal. A second report from the lighthouse echoes reply.

Guido had fortunately had a tolerable start, and, being a first-rate runner, was now making the best of it. He was as yet alone, flying like a phantom through the gloom—running as only a man who has life and liberty at stake can run. On—on—on—ever onwards.

But ere many minutes had elapsed pursuers were at his heels.

On he sped, keeping to the hollows as much as possible, hands upon hips, feet fleetly spurning every obstacle upon their path.

The original plan had been at once to gain the interior of the island and, after keeping close there for a day or two, make his way down to the coast to the spot which had been indicated to him. The cut in his foot, which at every yard was growing more and more painful, necessitated a change. He suddenly turned sharply off to the right, down one of the many depressions leading to the sea.

On—on—on—amid briar and bush—trailing plants enviously hemming his way—cropping ridges of stone causing him to reel and

stumble; yet ever on, and, despite growing weariness, with no thought of giving in upon his mind. There is a faint paling in the East—morning is about to break. The fugitive holds on his course bravely. One ridge more and he will almost have reached his goal.

The summit is won—there, for a second, his pursuers catch sight of his agile form dimly defined against the paling sky. A shout rings across the gully and tells him, as plainly as any words could have done, that he has been sighted.

His efforts redouble. How he crashes down the declivity! Down—down—down—crushing the aromatic herbs under foot—sending the loose stones flying. A sudden turn hides him from his pursuers. He now leaps from rock to rock, thus leaving no trace behind. On, along the shore, till a high bluff bars further passage. Not to him, though, for, without hesitation, he plunges into the slumbering sea and, with a few vigorous strokes, rounds it.

When his pursuers reached the spot they found no trace on either land or water.

CHAPTER II.

THE GROTTO DELLA FOCA.

It was a strange place, that in which the weary youth lay sleeping. More like a scene in some fairy tale than a reality of this prosaic earth. Above and around, the solid rock with its marvellous tints of red and grey, the gently heaving waters flinging fantastic, shadowy ripplings upon the fretted arch overhead and the inner walls of the cavern at the extreme end, a wide bed of yellow sand upon which the sleeper lay stretched. Not a glimpse of the wide world without—a whole tiny world in itself—a vault of stone and a floor of brine, with a weird light, now green, now blue, flickering and fluttering in harmony with the measured flow of the waters. Not a sound save the murmured lapping of the tide and the regular breathing of the sleeper; no further life save the sporting of a shoal of miniature fishes amid the azure.

The grotto, called into being by some freak of nature, or simply fretted out by the ever-lapping waters in the friable rock, had, in times gone by, served as the home of an aged seal. Hence its name. The seal itself, in all the humiliation of dust, a widowed glass eye, deficient stuffing and a mangy, moth-eaten hide, may be seen to this day in the old church of San Sepulchre, in Cagliari. How it ever came to be stranded there is a mystery.

The grotto is known to everyone by name, though next to none can tell the exact spot. Perhaps not two persons out of the entire population have ever entered it. Accident alone must have led to its discovery, for it is quite invisible from without. The rock looks as solid from the sea as does that of Gibraltar, and the cavern is only to be reached by diving.

Guido Fontana had first heard it casually mentioned by one of his friends who had visited it years ago in company with an older friend, since dead. Perhaps the sharing the good Professor's multiplied excursions to strange and unfrequented spots had awakened in the young man's mind a relish for similar places—perhaps it was the prompting of some unknown adviser that urged him to seek out the grotto for himself. He had done so and discovered it. Whim or destiny had certainly led to his first visit. Most likely the latter. The turning down some one particular street in preference to another has, more than once, decided a life-course. Who can fathom the mysteries by which we are so thickly and continually surrounded?

But for his wounded foot the Grotto della Foca would in no wise have entered into his plan of escape; as it turned out, it offered him a reliable haven in his urgent necessity.

His first visit to the grotto, two years before his trial, had also been fruitful to him of good in quite another way. While sitting there upon the sand-strewn ledge, looking curiously about him, his attention had been caught by a glittering drop which, after forming overhead, fell into the sand beneath, quite near to where he was resting. He could, however, discover no trace of moisture either in the sand below, or the stone above, and while wondering how such a thing could be, he leisurely plunged his hand into the sand and turned it over and over. What was his astonishment at bringing to light a number of globules of quicksilver. Unwittingly he had come upon a deposit of this erratic metal, a large quantity of which had lodged in a sort of pocket in the rocky ledge. Then he sat and watched, and once more saw the drop gather slowly and plash down beside him.

He had discovered, or, rather, rediscovered, a vein of quicksilver, about which a legend yet lingered around San Bartolomeo, to the effect that one of the convicts in old times had struck a similar vein, and, on being pressed to reveal the secret, had obstinately refused. It was even added that, seeking his opportunity, he baffled every chance of his find being of benefit to others by turning the vein seawards and causing it to lose itself amid the waters.

Was this perhaps the very vein itself? Was it another? It mattered little; the mineral was there, and Guido imagined and executed a plan by which to avail himself of his find. After carefully collecting the quicksilver in a bottle upon a next and early visit, he fixed an earthen pot below the droppings so as to catch them as they fell, and, from that time, he continued to visit the cavern at stated periods and carry off his booty. He had no difficulty in selling the silver to a chemist in Cagliari, who paid him about one-third of its real value, but who, in compensation, kept the secret. The money thus made Guido carefully treasured up in a leathern belt and buckled the same round his waist and next his skin. Everything

had been so quietly and skilfully done that not a soul ever suspected either the source or the money it produced.

Guido slept on, his hand upon the said belt, the flickering shadows dancing upon the rocky wall and ceiling, and giving a strange semblance of motion to the slumberer's features.

He would have been a study for either poet or painter. His lithe form and beautiful head showing in soft relief upon the gold-tinted sand on which he lay; the long lashes overshadowing his sunburnt cheeks, where a tinge of healthy red mingled with the olive; the full, ruddy lips, slightly parted and revealing the white, even teeth; the fine, silky moustache giving token of manhood; the pure oval of the face and the flowing line of the limbs recalling some Grecian statue of the days when Grecian art was in its prime. Thus he lay, one hand grasping his belt, the other arm flung over his head. An Endymion such as would have made an artist's reputation.

It was high noon when he awoke and, sitting up, gazed around him.

A smile of satisfaction, fleeting, if you will, broke over his features. He had won the battle thus far; who could say that he was not to be victor to the end?

He was able to make a good guess as to the hour by the increase of light within the grotto, and it was with a mingling of satisfaction and regret that he yielded to the necessity of remaining yet some hours in his present position. He dared not set out till night should have set in. There was, however, no very stringent need for his remaining within the cavern. Indeed, his awakening appetite prompted his leaving it as quickly as possible. He was horribly hungry, and the flesh-pots he had left behind him—flesh-pots which were probably just then being brought into requisition—and even the roasted potatoes of Bal and his friend rose to mind with an unpleasant keenness. He actually caught himself wondering if they had found ashes sufficient to roast them, and if they had turned out well. So continually do foolish trifles intrude upon us in situations of deepest gravity.

Making up his clothes into the smallest and compactest bundle possible, and then grasping it firmly with one hand, he dived deftly and silently—so deftly as hardly to flutter the little fishes—and rose as silently amid the full glare of noon. With head carefully kept just above water, he scanned the horizon. Nothing was to be seen; nothing but a distant steamer outward bound, gliding rapidly through the slumbering waters, and flinging behind its track a thin ribbon of fleecy smoke.

From the cliff nothing was to be dreaded; it was all but inaccessible from land; utterly unscaleable from sea.

Cautiously he swam round the foot of the bluff and peered forth in the direction of Cagliari. Not a sign of man to be seen; only a goat or two browsing among the rocks on high. Not a sound save

the monotonous song of a cigala from her perch amid the branches of a perishing cork tree.

Keeping well under water, and as close to the rocks as was possible, he set to work to collect some of the shell-fish with which the entire coast of Sardinia is so lavish. Arselle in the sand, sea urchins in the rocky crevices, sea-dates among the waving wreaths of weed, crabs of all sizes and colours everywhere. There was no lack of food, such as it was, and, for a time, a man might manage to support life upon it.

If Guido did not exactly satisfy his hunger, it was due more to the quality than the quantity. His consumption of molluscs was enormous. He at last curled himself up in a cleft in the cliff with something of a sensation of repletion, and the huge tuft of yuccas that overshadowed him would have bid defiance to the lynx eyes of even the dreaded Lippo himself.

Overhead towered the bold crags upon which the lighthouse of St. Elia stands; before him stretched the blue sea with the now vanishing steamer far in the distance. The monotonous swish of the swell as it died upon the sandy shore, and the hoarse, grating song of the cigala were the only sounds to be heard. Earth, air and sky were full of the splendour and drowsiness of a cloudless noon; the sun-steeped, aromatic herbs exhaled their fragrance, which, from time to time, was tempered by the acrid scent of brine.

Guido drank in light and liberty at every pore.

The scream of an eagle overhead made him look up. The bird was soaring upon motionless wings through the blue ether, and, as he watched its flight, how he yearned to follow it. Then memories of the past surged up, and he called to mind how, one day, on one of the many excursions with the kind Professor, they had sat upon the summit of a smiling Tuscan hill, and watched an eagle soaring just as that one was now soaring over his head. Thicker and thicker rose the memories of those happy days.

Once more he was a boy. A happy boy living with his widowed mother in their peaceful Tuscan home; no other sharer in the long, low house and its shady garden but the "Professor Piedmontese," who, from time to time, used to come and pass a month or so with them, paying handsome board, and busying himself, from early morning till late at night, with studying certain antiquities in the neighbourhood which were to figure largely in the work he was compiling upon the "Vestiges of the Etruscans, and their Influence upon the Arts of the Present Day."

Guido could have numbered the windows of the low, rambling house, have told the very trees in the wild, neglected garden, with its cracked marble basin and noseless statue in the centre, its lemon trees in huge red vases around, its tangle of unpruned rose-bushes and straggling vines. All arose before him with agonising vividness as he lay there under the yuccas, his clothes spread out beside him to dry.

And the pleasant excursions with the Professor—now here—now there! But ever a holiday to him. The hasty meal upon the breezy hill-side, the wide plain stretching at their feet with towns and villages glinting in the sunshine, and the Arno winding like a silver serpent through its green fertility. The Doctor's exclamations of triumph when patient research brought to light proof evident of the theory he was asserting. His long explanations, dimly understood, yet ever welcome. The cheery kindness to his mother and himself; his promptitude in solving difficulties which to their more limited minds had appeared insuperable.

And his mother! Here Guido buried his face in his hands as if to shut out the visions that seethed up in bitter mockery.

Was he really going to see her again? Was he once more to feel her dear arms around his neck; hear her loving voice after years of the cruellest of separation?

Yes, years! And years spent in the companionship of men of every dye, instead of in that of two of the best and gentlest beings God had ever created.

He dipped his fevered hands into the tiny stream that trickled down the rock beside him, and bathed brow and lip.

His morning of life had been so full of sunshine and love; his manhood so replete with bitterness. And its end? What was that to be? None could tell; himself least of all.

Was he destined to reach the spot that had been indicated to him as a haven of temporary refuge?

It was not the distance—that was comparatively trifling. It was the risk of being hunted down and taken before he could get clear of the immediate neighbourhood. If he could once reach Carbonaro and the near ruin of the "Fortezza Vecchia," where a suit of clothes and provisions for the remainder of his journey had been concealed, the rest of the way to the "City of the Dead" was tolerably easy. But to reach the "Fortezza" he would have to cross the promontory of St. Elia, and vigilant foes were certainly lurking there. Every bush might conceal a Lippo—every thicket bristle with soldiers.

Yet it must be attempted. Six hours would suffice to gain the "Fortezza," the rest of his journey would depend upon circumstances. Would that sun overhead never decline? Would darkness never again fall upon the earth?

Then once again the book of the past unfolded itself.

Leaf after leaf was turned over; leaves without spot, leaves closely written over with the characters of love. The happy meals taken by the three under the shade of the great magnolia in the garden in summer, with the perfume of rose and jessamine around; in winter, by the bright fireside, with the aroma of roasting chestnuts rising from the hearth. The sudden appearances and disappearances of the eccentric Professor, who was wont to set forth upon some unspoken journey—of wandering—with only a last word of warning and fare-

well. His entry into the house after months of absence, with as little ceremony as if he had left them but yesterday; entering perhaps while they were at a meal—at early sunrise—during the small hours of the night.

"Be sure you keep my letters safe," was invariably the last injunction, and then, with a kindly smile and a wave of his brown hand, off he was, carrying his inseparable little black and battered valise with him.

How he had nursed Guido when the latter was down with typhus! How he had sat up, night after night, leaving MSS., excursions, study—everything, in fact, to minister to his wants, smoothing out his pillows, handing his medicines with the assiduity and gentleness of a woman!

Leaning upon the Professor's arm, he had taken his first tottering walk, and it was the Professor who had devised all kinds of little diversions in order to bring back health and happiness to the household.

Now, it was a pleasant drive over the leafy plain, amid fields gay with blue and scarlet anemones, under banks fringed with nodding narcissus; now meeting a cart laden with vegetables, and drawn by sleek, cream-coloured, black-eared oxen, whose large, dark eyes, it seemed to him, used to gaze at him in gentle pity as they passed. Now encountering some gay equipage, with ladies within, who smiled encouragement and goodwill, sometimes even stopped to question and sympathise.

Then came whole days spent upon the breezy hills, amid the fragrance of rosemary and thyme, the carol of the lark and the hum of the bee.

Yes. Unwearying kindness and endless sunshine seemed to have filled his path in those days. Life had been an eternal spring. And now?

Well! winter had come.

The Professor had left them as usual, without telling them either whither he was going, or when he should return. It was quite possible that he could have told neither. Guido and his mother were alone in their little home. The harvest was over, and the vintage drawing near. Gold and amber and purple were beginning to gleam through the green leaves; the pears hung in luscious clusters upon the bough. Sturdy September, that pleasantest of all months in Italy, was smiling broadly over the land. Earth had recovered from her summer languor, and a new life had been infused into every living thing. The roses were blooming once more, the sky was blue as a turquoise, the air so clear that every furrow in the distant mountains stood out strongly defined. The nights were cool, the days enchanting. It was weather such as Adam and Eve must have known in Eden.

"Guido," cried his mother, entering his room, "it is near six; you

must get up; you will only just have time to dress and meet your friends as you promised."

Greca approached the bed in which her son lay sleeping; she shook him gently by the shoulder. Though Guido was now over twenty-two, his mother was yet almost as handsome a woman as she had been years back when her beauty had been proverbial in her native city, Pisa; which city can boast of, perhaps, more lovely women than any other town in Italy. She had been run after and courted by high and low, but had shown preference to none till a cousin had appeared upon the scene. He wooed her successfully, and, to the disgust of all her other admirers, carried her off as his wife to the distant home in which he lived. After a few years of marriage her husband died, leaving her the little property upon which they were dwelling, and which she never since had left. Her life in every sense of the word was bound up in that of her son.

Once more she laid her hand upon Guido's shoulder. This time he opened his eyes, looked up, and smiled fondly at his mother.

"How handsome you are to-day," he said. "Why, you seem to grow younger and younger! But I do wish, mother, that you wouldn't always wear black."

Greca shook her head. "I'm an old woman now," she replied, laughing, "and there is nothing like black for old women."

She did look unusually handsome that September morning as she stood there in her dark, ample skirts beside her son's bed. There was hardly a silver thread in the mass of raven hair, scarcely a line around the finely-cut mouth, or upon the white temples with their blue veins just faintly showing beneath the soft skin. Her eyes were large and luminous, and her teeth still good. A handsome, proud-looking woman, with a tall form and the carriage of a queen.

"Get up, Guido; get up," she repeated. "You're late already. The day is as fine a one as you could wish for."

Guido flung his arm over her shoulder, drew her down to him, and kissed her.

An excursion had been planned by Guido and some of his friends to a little osteria about ten miles off. They were to walk there, dine, and come back in the evening by water. Boats were always to be hired at the place, which had acquired a reputation miles and miles around for its excellent fish dinners. The proprietor was an elderly man, and a curious compound of cook and fisher, waiter and waterman. The combination paid well, however, for Papa Agostino was making quite a nice fortune out of it. Guido's friends were not numerous; though, had he chosen, they would have been innumerable. His time did not allow of too much leisure; for he had been appointed sub-factor to one of the wealthy local proprietors, and though his duties were not heavy, yet they at times kept him from home for many hours during the day. And Guido, without being in the least a milksop, much preferred his mother's company to

the society of others. He was liked by all; but for him his mother and the Professor were sufficient.

The present occasion was a rare event, and it is quite possible that, had Guido been left to himself, he would have found some excuse for not joining in it. As it was, Greca's urging him to go is only another proof of none on earth being either maker or master of his own destiny. Only another example of those to whom we are dearest unwittingly conducing to our undoing.

It was Greca who encouraged him to go—it was his mother who aided him eagerly to get ready in time—it was the best friend he had in the world who smiled a loving farewell to him upon the doorstep of their happy home, and sent him forth to destruction.

How often in their subsequent agony mother and son had recalled this to mind! In the crevice of that rock, crouching under the shade of that tuft of yuccas, Guido faithfully followed, step by step, every trifling circumstance of that fatal day.

They were five in number: as light-hearted, lithe-limbed a lot of lads as ever the sun shone on. Away they went, straight across the country, youthfully regardless of road and right of way. Now traversing a stubble field in which the young autumn flowers were already beginning to open their starry eyes; now skirting a vineyard with its wealth of purple promise—here under the shade of wreathing vines festooned from elm to elm, there exposed to the full power of the golden sunshine as it flooded a series of grassy meadows; now rambling along hedges of blackberry with their bunches of ripening fruit waving softly in the pure air; then entering a poplar wood where shimmering shadows danced upon the soft, sweet herbage; skirting fruity orchard, meandering stream, and things of beauty such as the hand of the Creator alone can bestow. On—on—on—ever nearing the far-off hills—heart light as step, jest and laughter ever breaking forth to join in Nature's concert. On—on—on—joyous and exulting in the exuberance of happiness and life, and yet each step bringing one of them nearer and nearer to his earthly ruin. It was heart-breaking to recall.

On the bank of a little rivulet bordered with thick grass and tufts of purple flowers they had come upon two boys seated under the shade of a tree. They were busily engaged in torturing a poor green lizard that they had caught, and which now lay between them in a state that would have moved any but an Italian urchin's heart to pity. There was the poor dumb thing, writhing in agony, with mutilated tail and leg, and too much exhausted to attempt escape, even had it been free from the cruel string so tightly knotted around its poor body.

"You young wretches, what are you doing?" cried Guido as he halted in front of them. "Why are you tormenting the poor beast like that?"

He flung the two boys aside and took up the suffering animal.

"Bah," put in one of his companions, "it's only a lizard; what does it matter? Leave the younkers to their sport."

Guido made no reply. He was examining the poor bruised creature carefully. That done, he set it down without a word, and, placing his heel upon its head, crushed out the feeble remains of life in a second.

"Well," said one of his friends as they walked on, "that's one way of showing commiseration. You've been much more cruel than the boys you reproved."

"No, I haven't. The lizard would only have lingered on in agony. It was better to end all at once. There are times when death must be the greatest relief."

How often in later times did the remembrance of those words occur to him!

The hills were gradually rising before them; they were nearing their destination. Nor were they sorry. The walk had been a delightful one, it is true; but youth is a hungry season, and the sun was scorching enough at times to make the prospect of a draft of cool white wine under the broad boughs of one of Papa Agostino's fig-trees a pleasant one. They had only a few more fields to cross, then came the bank of the river. The osteria was on the opposite side, but an old man in a ferry-boat on seeing them approach at once came to carry them over.

The osteria itself was not worthy of any particular admiration. A long, low house on the bank of the stream, with a few fig and other trees around it, under which were placed little tables and rustic stools for the convenience of those who preferred to eat their fish outside. In the background rose the hills with their rich woody mantle; in front stretched the plain they had just passed, marshy and ugly in the immediate vicinity of the water—patches of coarse, yellow sand alternating with coarse rushes and wiry grass, a few pollard willows dotted here and there. Directly in front of the building was a little wharf formed of a few rude planks, and here were moored the four or five boats belonging to the establishment.

The place appeared unusually full, and it was some little time before seats could be procured for the new-comers.

"That old curmudgeon of a fellow must be doing a first-rate business," remarked one of them as they took their seats under a shady tree at a table close to another already laid, and against which were ranged three upturned chairs in token of reservation. Around, but at wider distances, were other tables occupied by groups of merry pleasure-seekers discussing the viands before them. Ragged boys rambled hither and thither, waiting upon the guests as best they could. They were one and all relatives of the host, who had a liking for keeping the business in the family. It cost him less; and as his customers were not, generally speaking, very fastidious, the speculation was certainly a paying one.

There was the usual contingent of pecking fowls, fluttering pigeons and prowling cats making the round of the tables; here meeting with crumbs, there with cuffs, and apparently accepting both with the same equanimity. Flies, as well as all other insects proper to open-air entertainments, abounded.

There was the occasional popping of a cork, and the running fire of clinking glasses—the confused hum of human voices—an exclamation here—a shout there, according to the spirit that moved the diners. Now and then a dispute with one of the ragged attendants over the quality or price of some dish or bottle: a dispute always culminating in a summons for the host in person, who ever managed to get the best of the matter, and make himself out to be right and his guest wrong—the whole diversified by the occasional upsetting of a glass, or the breakage of a flask: trifles which, far from disturbing the general content, seemed rather to contribute to it.

Bread, salt, and wine had already been upon the table for some considerable time when, at last, the promised fish also appeared. The party at once fell to with the hearty good-will born of youth and a ten-miles' morning walk.

Then happened a circumstance which, to any but an Italian, would have passed unheeded, almost. Guido, in handing a plate across the table, upset the oil cruet and sent a thick yellow river meandering over the cloth.

A muttered exclamation broke from all who witnessed the accident, and more than one secretly crossed himself. It boded ill-luck of a serious kind. Far direr than that foreshadowed by the upsetting of salt. That may be overcome: but oil, never. Even the ragged lad called upon to repair the disaster looked at Guido with an air that seemed to express his satisfaction at not finding himself in his shoes. Wine spilled upon a table, down a throat, or elsewhere betokens mirth; but oil—! The momentary gloom, however, wore off after a while, and something like their primitive gaiety returned—the traces of the disaster had been covered up with a clean napkin—the faces of the guests once more relaxed.

At this juncture the party to whom the reserved table was destined came up and commenced making themselves at home.

On catching sight of the new-comers, one of Guido's companions nudged him and whispered, "There is Negroni; don't look round—he is there with his two cousins."

Guido's face flushed, but he continued eating without turning his head. Negroni was the one implacable enemy possessed by Guido in the world. His enemy, too, by no fault of his, but merely owing to the fact of his having obtained the place of sub-factor, and Negroni's having failed in doing so. It was barbarous, unjust, anything you will; but it was also sufficient to awaken a deep and deadly hatred in the breast of a man despicable as was Negroni. And he never lost an opportunity of showing that hatred in the most cowardly manner.

Every petty occasion was seized upon and made the most of in order to let fall a vague word here, exhibit a sneer there. A thoroughly bad and tolerably clever man can ever manage matters for his purpose without actually running any very great personal risk. For Negroni was also a coward and immensely careful of his long, lean person. You could read cowardice in the small dark eyes that never would, or could, look anyone straight in the face. His laughter, too, had a false ring in it that told a whole tale in itself.

For a while all went well—either Negroni had not remarked his rival's presence—they were sitting back to back—or he was, perhaps, meditating what covert attack to make use of. It would seem that all his attention was concentrated upon the plate before him and the glass at his side.

Meanwhile fish disappeared, and wine began to circulate more briskly; cigars and pipes were lit, elbows rested upon the table, and voices, hitherto restrained, grew louder and louder. Not a few oaths exploded from time to time like rockets in the sultry air, and one downright earnest squabble broke forth at one of the distant tables over the rightful division of the cost of the meal.

Guido and his friends, however, were among the reasonable part of the company, and sat on, chatting, smoking, and enjoying themselves in the quietest of ways.

So far all had gone off pleasantly. Negroni, on recognising Guido, had flushed up to the eyes, then grown, if possible, paler than before. But he had given no further sign of emotion of any kind. Soon after this, he and his companions went off to the bowling ground where, after choosing partners, they commenced playing.

Later on, Guido and his friends joined the lookers-on at the game.

How it exactly happened, no one ever knew. The trial itself even never brought out the facts very clearly. Many varied versions got abroad, the best substantiated being the following: Guido, as unfortunately as unwittingly, got into the way of Negroni's partner just as he was about to bowl, at which Negroni, somewhat excited with wine, though not sufficiently to be declared intoxicated, shouted out, "Clear the way there, you Professor's ——!" making use of a term which reflected upon his mother, and which no true son of a true mother could ever leave unavenged.

What followed is impossible to describe—so quickly did it all pass. There was a momentary struggle between the two infuriated men—a cloud of dust as they swayed from side to side—an exclamation suddenly interrupted by a heavy fall. Negroni lay dead upon the ground. Guido, in a fit of ungovernable rage, had stabbed his adversary to the heart.

Early that same morning Guido had seen his mother smiling a loving farewell upon him from the door of their home—looking the proud, happy woman she really was; that evening mother and son

saw each other again—he in the hands of the police—she with, apparently, the burden of a score of years added to her age.

Guido Fontana was tried for wilful murder and condemned to death. Some informality in the proceedings was taken advantage of by his lawyers and a fresh trial was instituted. The sentence this time was confinement in a penal establishment for twenty years. The poor Professor moved heaven and earth to obtain a mitigation, but without success. Guido was taken to Comacchio, where he remained for a year; then he was drafted to San Bartolomeo. The event became a part of the past, and was quickly forgotten by all save those more nearly concerned. They could never forget.

If the poor Professor's influence had been unavailing to obtain pardon, or even mitigation, his money availed much in the keeping up of a secret, though naturally limited, correspondence with the convict. It was he who had laid the plan of escape—he who had undertaken everything. He had accompanied Greca to Sardinia, and left her there in a secure place and with trustworthy people. Should all go well, he intended taking mother and son over to Corsica, and thence on to England. He watched over them both from afar, and every step taken by either was faithfully transmitted to him.

(*To be concluded.*)

SONNET.

And think'st thou, friend, great geniuses are born
'Mongst us but each two or three hundred years?
Think'st thou they rise like solitary stars
In great wide blanks of darkness?—Noon or morn,
July, drear winter, green woods, islands born
Mid oceans have the selfsame sun,
But not one spot, one hour, one season's run.
Give us back faith and love, and hate and scorn,
And Dante shall arise! Through Tasso's song
Sings chivalry. Let tragic passions stir
Man's soul, and Shakespeare's once more speaks for her.
As his age feels—in accents deep or strong,
Or passionate or cold, weak or sublime,
The poet sings—the echo of his time.

Julia Kavanagh.

FAIR NORMANDY.

By Charles W. Wood, F.R.G.S., Author of "Through Holland," "Letters from Majorca," etc. etc.

Normandy Peasant.

ONE bright morning our landlord came to us with a countenance expressive of an important communication. He had heard that H. C. was a great lover of antiquities. The fame of his English collection had reached his ears. If ever he came to England he hoped he might be permitted to visit his museum—for he believed it was nothing less than a museum. If he might be excused, Monsieur was young to be the possessor of so celebrated a collection. He presumed it had in part come to him by inheritance.

Partly, H. C. replied; and we wondered what this was to lead up to. We soon discovered.

"There is a wonderful piece of furniture in the neighbourhood," said the landlord. "I am told that it is hundreds of years old and is worth hundreds of pounds. It would be quite worth an excursion."

"Is it for sale?" asked H. C., immediately becoming animated, whilst the flush of hope rose to his usually pale countenance.

"The owner is not anxious to sell it," replied our host, cautiously, "but I believe that she would do so for a consideration. It is an heirloom in her family, and one does not part with heirlooms very willingly."

"And who is the fortunate owner?" asked H. C.

"She is Mademoiselle Martin," replied the landlord, "Receveuse des

Postes de Retraite, a very amiable and well-known lady living at Grâce. She would be charmed to receive you even if you did not buy the meuble. Nothing pleases her better than for people to go and admire it and have a little conversation with her. She is quite an original character, is Mdlle. Martin."

"How far is it to Grâce?" asked H. C., who in imagination was already the possessor of this wonderful piece of antiquity.

"It would necessitate a little excursion," replied our host. "You might devote a whole afternoon to that and a few more places in the neighbourhood. You might, for instance, visit Villeneuve, which is on the sea coast, and inspect the ruins of the old Castle. It would be well worth your while."

More antiquities. As far as H. C. was concerned, I saw that the affair was settled. This would necessitate our remaining a day longer in Coutances than we had intended: "but that was nothing," he said with the air of a man who has Time and the World at his command; "it was only one of those small changes and uncertainties which add to the charm of travel."

"Then you decide to go," said the landlord. "You do well. I will order the Victoria at once."

"But," exclaimed H. C. anxiously, "can we be back in time for table-d'hôte? Much as I love antiquities, I cannot sacrifice my digestion to them."

"Be assured on that point," replied the landlord; "both for your sake and mine I will make it right with the coachman—a most intelligent man. Have you not thought him so?"

We had. Whilst not exactly neglecting our interests, we had seldom found a man who took better care of his own. But we did not quarrel with him for that reason. In this world you must give and take; there must always be a quid pro quo; and, with honesty and a due regard to duty, the system works fairly well.

So we started on our visit to Mdlle. Martin and her antiquities, wondering whether the result would equal the expectations our host had raised in our credulous minds.

Once more the day was lovely; the skies were blue and serene, the air was fresh and sparkling. There was a suspicion of autumn in it, but the sun shone hotly and the two formed a very harmonious combination. One could not help feeling exhilarated. Our coachman saluted us amiably as he prepared to clatter up the narrow street. Once more we passed the grand and imposing cathedral, all its magnificent outlines, its tall spires and central tower standing out clearly against the background of the sky. The old women were in the market place with their pumpkins, dwelling for ever under the shadow of these venerable walls, as I have said, yet probably uninfluenced by their sanctity; or perhaps unconsciously receiving a life-long "sermon in stones." The bells struck out the hour from the steeple as we passed, and the sound went vibrating far

into the air, reaching it may be—who knows—beyond the blue sky that seemed at once so near and so far off.

We passed away from Coutances out into the country, the green fields and flowering hedgerows all about us; the trees waving and whispering in the wind; everything sunshine and sparkle and happiness; that infinite repose over all that nature so often wears.

Occasionally we rattled through a quiet village, where the days succeed and resemble each other with a monotony its inhabitants never dream of and do not feel. Their short and simple annals are summed up in the daily round of their occupations, with no thought or aspiration beyond. I do not think they are to be pitied. We build great hopes, and form great plans, and dream ambitious dreams; but our castles are too often built upon the sand, and disappear in the ebb and flow of destiny's uncertain tide.

At last we reached Grâce, where Mdlle. Martin lived and held her little court and dispensed her pensions. The coachman did not quite know the way, nor did we. But not being of those who are backward in asking, we embraced the favourable opportunity of entering into conversation with an imposing military-looking man who stood smoking in his doorway.

"Did he know Mdlle. Martin?"

"Mdlle. Martin, Receveuse des Postes de Retraite? Parbleu! who did not know Mdlle. Martin! Everyone knew Mademoiselle. She was as well known in Grâce as the President of the Republic was known in Paris: in fact, better. Mdlle. Martin! why, she and her ancestors had inhabited Grâce from time immemorial. They were illustrious."

All this we did not dispute; but might we ask the way to Mdlle. Martin's abode?

That was easily found, for there was her house—pointing to a slate-coloured roof which stood at right angles with his own doorway. He had the honour himself of periodically receiving his retraite at the hands of Mdlle. Martin. She had a way of dispensing her favours that was all her own. True, the pensions came from Government, but somehow one almost felt as if they came out of Mdlle. Martin's own pocket, and one felt equally grateful. It was her gracious way. There was so much difference in people. Some were all sunshine—made everyone happy about them; whilst others were nothing but storm and tempest, continually disturbing the social atmosphere of their little world.

We had alighted upon a wayside philosopher; a man who studied human nature; perhaps was a disciple of Lavater, and interpreted the "strange problem of the human face divine."

"This seems a quiet village," we remarked, by way of drawing him out a little more.

"Dame, Messieurs," he replied, "all villages are more or less quiet. We have no great events here. The chief days in the calendar bring

us no change. Our greatest excitement is a funeral, when we most of us turn out and follow the procession to the grave. Some of the villagers work in the fields; a few beat out flax. I am an old soldier and have seen the world, and lost my arm when I was a young man of twenty in the Crimea—we were in the trenches before Sebastopol. Ah, what a misery that was! And yet our sufferings were little compared with the sufferings of your troops through the mismanagement of your Government—for I see that Monsieur is English by the very pose of his hat and the sit of his clothes. I have heard it said that only Frenchwomen know how to dress, and I reply that, en revanche, only Englishmen know how to dress: a Frenchman, even in full dress, is only a caricature at the best; a popinjay. I have lived in Paris, monsieur, and I ought to know. And there goes Mdlle. Martin across the road.—Bon jour, mademoiselle. Here are two English gentlemen inquiring for you," he called out, arresting the little lady's hurrying footsteps.

She looked round and hesitated.

"These gentlemen want you, mademoiselle," he continued. "Probably the fame of your magnificent cabinet has reached them; it is as well known in Coutances as the Post Office, and makes as much noise there as the great bell of the cathedral."

I believe that the good old soldier would have gone on talking until now if we had only stood to listen. We had opened the floodgates of his eloquence, and a mighty torrent was ready to come forth. Fortunately, Mdlle. Martin approached and rescued us. She was a quaint and curious little body, wore a black gown and a white cap, was delightfully old-fashioned in her ways and movements and the ceremonious curtsey that she gave us. She might have been a Court lady of the First Empire.

"The gentlemen are welcome," she said, addressing ourselves and the old soldier together. "If they will do me the honour of coming into my house, I will show them the meuble willingly. Au plaisir, Monsieur Marcel."

"Tout à vous, Ma'amselle Martin," replied the old soldier, giving her a military salute. And this quaint and curious old-world couple separated. We gave Monsieur Marcel a hearty au revoir, and followed in Mademoiselle's footsteps, as she tripped lightly across the road and flitted round the turning.

Mdlle. Martin was no longer young as we count years, but she was slim and small, and light and active, and she tripped along like a girl, and her voice was agreeable; neither shrill nor piercing, but gently modulated, as if she had been much with the sick or sorrowful.

Her house was at hand: a low, broad house, with a slanting slated roof, her business room on one side the door, her living room on the other. She passed in at the small garden gate, and tripped up the pathway, between the old-fashioned sweet-smelling flowers

that grew on either hand. She must have been a flower herself in her youth of a very sweet order, and we wondered that she had passed into an unappropriated blessing; but it is not always the best who are taken. Man is strangely eccentric in his choice of a helpmeet through life, and we sometimes see the lion mated with the lamb, the rose with the common flower of the field, the lily with the hollyhock; the vessel of clay mated to the vessel of gold. Probably Mademoiselle had had no *dot*, and this enters very much into the Frenchman's consideration of marriage. Or perhaps she had had her chance but had been very fastidious, and because her ideal had never appeared, or had appeared and never spoken, she had wisely remained single and kept to her first estate. She certainly did not look by any means unhappy; her expression was calm and placid; singularly so for a Frenchwoman, who is too often all fire and froth and sparkle, like a newly-opened bottle of champagne—and frequently, just as agreeable.

Mdlle. Martin was only gently animated; her life ran in quiet grooves; a chat with her neighbours and a flirtation with Monsieur Marcel the only interruptions to her daily life. And she had her occupation to keep her from ennui. It gave her something to do; made her an important functionary; the chief personage of the village; endued with certain responsibilities, holding a position of trust. But she was only a villager, after all, though a superior one in point of bearing and education; she was not a grande dame, though she curtsied like a Court lady, and boasted ancestors; her refinement was innate, though perhaps the fact of possessing ancestors had something to do with it; for blood is thicker than water, and if you have family respectability to maintain and old traditions to uphold, the "noblesse oblige" steps in even upon humble life, and helps to mould the character and to keep the footsteps in the straight path.

So we followed Mademoiselle very willingly, and when she entered her house she threw open her sitting-room door with an air, made us her Court-curtsey, and with a graceful wave of the hand bade us precede her.

"Soyez les bien venus, messieurs," she said, in French that was as good as everything else about her. "It is a pleasure to receive you in my humble abode."

The "humble abode" was the very pink of neatness and perfection. Not a chair was out of place; not a speck of dust was visible; the few ornaments were stiffly but irreproachably, mathematically, in position; the bed in an alcove—the usual French custom, stuffy and unwholesome though it be—was beautifully draped; a blue silk eiderdown peeped out coquettishly between flowered chintz curtains; and, however simply Mdlle. Martin lived by day, she reposed sumptuously at night. The stove in the room was not lighted, but was faultlessly polished. An open door disclosed a short passage, and at the end what was evidently Mdlle.'s kitchen, where she made her

savoury mysteries in a cheap and artistic way known only to the French ; where the pot-au-feu was always diffusing a delicious odour through the house, and, more often than not, at the cost of only a few half-pence a-day. Frugality is the keynote of the French humble household.

In Mdlle.'s kitchen we saw the goddess who presided at these

NORMANDY BUTTER-WOMEN.

culinary mysteries—or perhaps merely watched them—for Mdlle. probably dressed her own savoury messes. The goddess was youthful, and, as far as we could see, pretty, with a Norman prettiness that, at its best, is very captivating. She wore no cap, which probably reposed on a chair beside her, and her hair was golden and abundant, and might have been braided by a Court-hairdresser, to match Mdlle.'s Court-curtsey. She turned and looked at us—or rather at H. C., who made her a polite bow that brought the damask roses to

her cheeks. He had no business to do it, and he was punished. Mdlle. was observant and discreet; she thought that prevention was better than cure; she had no idea of locking the stable when the steed was stolen.

"Marianne, shut the door," she cried; and though the command was peremptory, the elevated voice was still musical.

The door was shut and the vision disappeared, and a light went out of H. C.'s face. "Gorgon!" he murmured beneath his breath; which shows how unjust we can be when our personal feelings are involved. For anything less like a Gorgon than Mdlle. Martin could not be conceived: she was gentleness itself; the suaviter in modo was real, and not assumed; but she was wise with it: and are we not told to combine the harmlessness of the dove with the wisdom of the serpent? Mdlle. could read character: and she looked at H. C., and she looked at Marianne, and the result of her scrutiny was a closed door and a Veiled Vision.

"This is the meuble," said Mdlle. Martin; and for the first time we detected something like the pride of possession in her tones. It was pardonable, for no one else owned such an heirloom in the village. It had brought herself fame and the village distinction. Mademoiselle was but mortal. We all have our weaknesses; they even often make us more lovable, so they pass not into sin. We may highly esteem a being on a pedestal but be in touch only with him who stands on our own level.

"This is the meuble," said Mademoiselle, closing the door by which we had entered, so that the full daylight fell upon it from her latticed window.

H. C. was immediately all attention, full of quiet excitement. Marianne was forgotten in a new attraction. At the best it seems that we are butterflies, flitting from flower to flower.

If nothing else had rewarded our vision, we should have been disappointed; but Monsieur Marcel and Mdlle. Martin were interesting specimens of humanity, worthy a far longer excursion than we had taken. We would not have missed them; and they, and not the cabinet, were the reward of our pilgrimage.

It was a large cupboard more than a cabinet; an excellent thing for a wardrobe or linen press. But we were disappointed in the carving. In place of scenes, or figures, or scrolls and flowers, the carving gave us nothing but geometrical designs. It is true that they were very good; genuine work of the seventeenth century, but not in the highest style of art. We, however, did not express our disappointment; not a word would we say to wound Mademoiselle's ancestral prejudices. On the contrary, we were glad that we could conscientiously praise it.

Mademoiselle listened and was pleased.

"And you wish to sell it?" we asked.

"Ah, no, monsieur; I do not wish it. I should be very sorry to

part with it. It is an heirloom, and was in the family in the days of my great great grandmother. But I am told it is valuable; worth six thousand francs, and six thousand francs is a consideration. I have no direct descendant, and the money would be very useful. The chances are that those who come after me will not appreciate the cabinet. To them it will hardly be an heirloom. They might even sell it for an old song. And so I have made up my mind to part with it if I can get my price for it. But I am not anxious; and the day that I see it depart I know that I shall regret the loss more than I shall value the gain."

"It is an ornament to your room, and gives distinction to it," said H. C., politely; "but it is almost too large, and takes up too many cubic feet. You would have more light and air, for instance, if that door were opened," pointing to the one which concealed the Vision.

But Mademoiselle only gave a polite smile in reply, and H. C. felt that he was not so difficult to interpret as a Delphic Oracle.

"Can you tell us anything of its history?" asked H. C.

"No," replied Mademoiselle; "excepting that for one hundred and fifty years it has been very uneventful. It belonged to my great great grandmother, and from her day it has been directly handed down from mother to daughter. I am the last direct descendant. With me the Martins will die out. There is something melancholy in being the last of one's race. It seems to close a chapter in the world's history, though it is only the end of great people that the world hears of. Not that my great great grandmother was an obscure villager. Her husband was a General in the King's army, and many a time dined at the King's table. We have gradually come down in the world: my father was a simple villager, and you see that I am only a Receveuse des Postes. But I am respectable and respected; and I daresay I am as happy as my great great grandfather was at the King's table."

"A contented mind is a continual feast," said H. C. "Those who have found it out are the truest philosophers."

"It is not philosophy that has taught me that," replied Mdlle. Martin, with a quiet smile, "unless we are born philosophers. But I have ever held it a truth, that to be contented with your lot and make the best of your mercies is not only the highest wisdom, but the only true way to be happy. You may have plenty of sunshine in life if you like."

"Surely you are perfection itself!" cried H. C. "Confession with you must be a superfluous act of religion."

"Ah, monsieur," laughed Mademoiselle, "lives there a heart that is not full of imperfection and naughtiness? All we can do is to battle bravely, and rise up the stronger for our falls."

"But your life is so quiet here," objected H. C. "Sins of omission and commission must be equally difficult to you."

"True as to the quietness," returned Mdlle. Martin. "Our lives

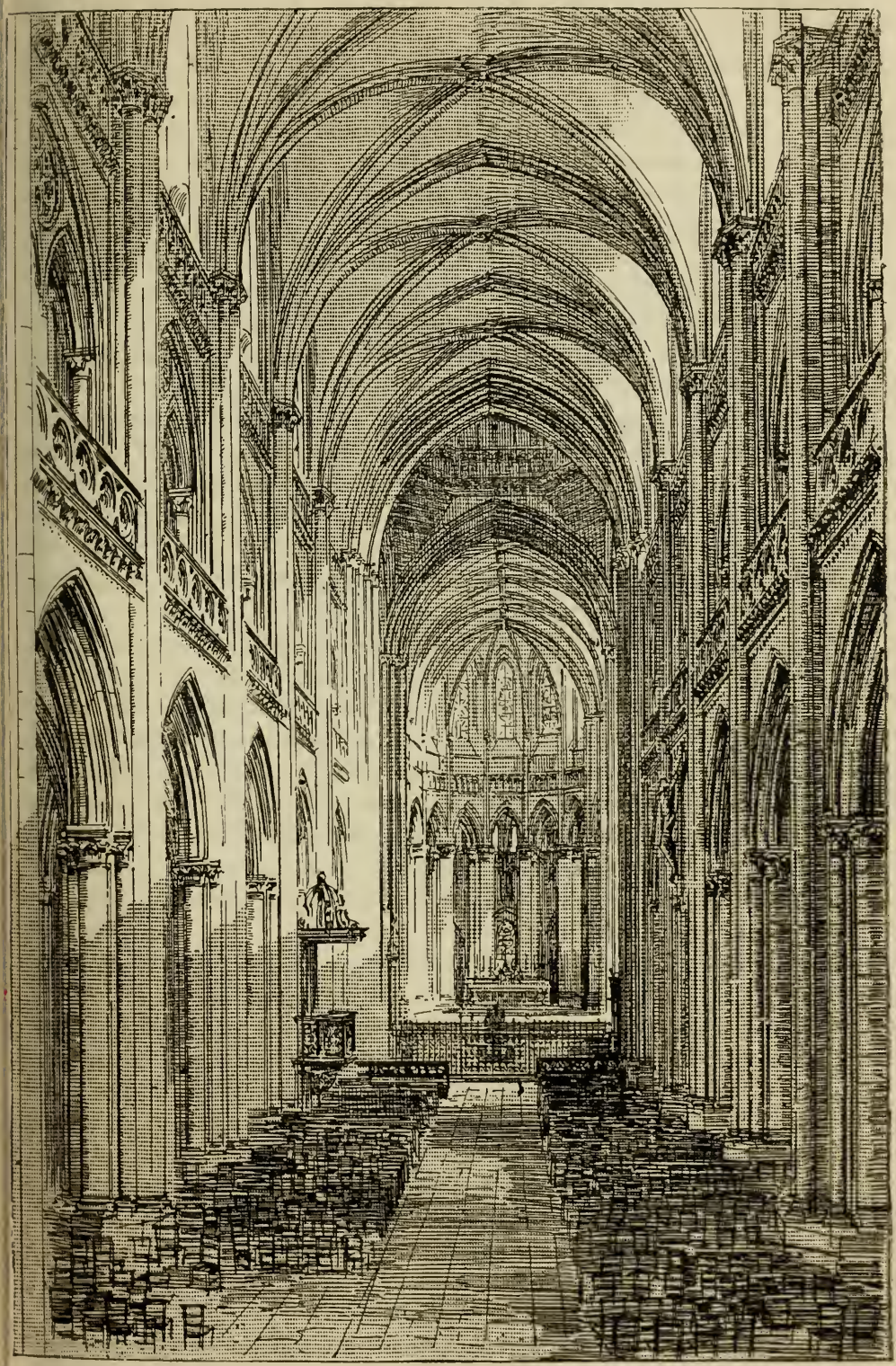
are not marked by events or excitements. But we have plenty of temptations, for all that. The devil finds his way into our quiet cottages just as easily as he does into the greater world."

Mdlle. Martin, like the old soldier, would have gone on for any length of time, but our moments were limited. She would have read an admirable paper at a Church Congress, and she really seemed an original and a strong character; but we were obliged to defer her further reflections, hoping to meet again. A faint hope; for these regions, pleasant though they are, scarcely admit of a second visit, when the world is so wide and life so short.

We departed with a happy impression of our experience of Grâce, and like the apostles of old, went on our way rejoicing. Mdlle. Martin accompanied us to her gate, tripping lightly between the flower-beds as before, and dismissed us with her Court-curtsey and an earnest "bon-voyage, messieurs!" to which we replied with an equally sincere "au revoir, mademoiselle!" Then she flitted back into her house, and we could imagine her seeking out Marianne and administering a mild lecture upon the necessity of maidens keeping their eyes to themselves, and not allowing them to rest upon the forms and faces of the perfidious sex.

Our drive was still very pleasant and pastoral; and as we went onwards we distinctly smelt the sea air and felt its freshness. On our left the small river Soulle ran its sparkling course to the shore, where its lesser life became absorbed in the greater; the inevitable law of nature. There are many small streams about here, which add their tribute to the sea, making music as they run, reflecting the sunlight in countless flashes that seem to animate the very air itself.

At Pont de la Roque, one approaches very near to the sea, and the river widens and becomes very tidal indeed. The place is nothing but a well-built modern bridge erected on the foundations of an ancient, which are quite visible. There are a few houses about, and the remains of a Roman camp, interesting by reason of its antiquity. Its boundaries may be traced, the artificial hill and fortifications, now grass-grown, and looking the very essence of peace. The sky above is blue and serene, not a sound disturbs the air, excepting a suspicion of a not very distant sea breaking lazily upon the shore. It is difficult to realise that the conquerors of the world once brought here their aggressive armies, fought battles, coolly took possession of what was not their own, and planted their banner upon the heights. Here once stood an ancient and strongly-fortified castle belonging to the feudal age, and destroyed in the fourteenth century, but we were not able to trace any vestige of its existence. From the summit of the camp the view was fine, commanding a wide sweep of country, the course of winding and flashing rivers, the modern bridge standing well and picturesquely, with its small neighbouring cottages; and—most beautiful of all—the deep blue sea beyond, with small fishing boats sleeping calmly upon its surface.



INTERIOR OF COUTANCES CATHEDRAL.

We soon found ourselves at Villeneuve, a small and very picturesque haven of the Manche. The sea was low, the beach flat and wide. Some boats were lying on their keels, high and dry upon the sand, picturesque as boats and all things connected with the sea ever are. A pier stretched out over the dry beach, where, at high water, small vessels unload their cargoes. It is a great place for oysters, is Villeneuve, in which it does a thriving trade. But the sea is encroaching here, and in course of time will sweep away many a landmark.

The coast winds round, and you obtain fine views of Montmartin—the chief town in the immediate neighbourhood, and Granville, with the steamers that go in and out of the latter port on their way to and from the Channel Islands.

Villeneuve is very quiet. There was an inn on the very borders of the shore, which looked as if a little smuggling might easily be carried on here with impunity. A few seafaring men stood about, lounging and doing nothing; waiting perhaps for the tide. A line of detached houses stood further back, but facing the sea, and we looked for signs of the old château, our *raison d'être* in this small, out-of-the-world, but very charming spot.

The château was pointed out to us, and we went up to it. It was simply a house of a certain age, built of grey stone, with mullioned windows, in part covered with ivy. Standing back from the road, it was guarded by railings and a locked gate, near which there hung an inviting bell-handle and chain. Between the house and the gate there grew lovely, sweet-scented flowers, just as we had seen them growing in Mdlle. Martin's garden. The whole place looked so quiet, so private, that we hesitated to ring. It seemed almost like intrusion. Here probably would be no Mdlle. Martin, with her Court-curtsey to bid us welcome.

However, we had come far, and we must risk our reception. We took courage, pulled the chain with no hesitating hand, and H. C. said he heard the echoes of a distant bell beating themselves upon his palpitating heart. I heard them also, but, not being a poet, I cannot express my sentiments in flowery language. Still, I think it very beautiful when I hear it, and perhaps it makes me just the least bit envious of H. C.

The door opened after an interval that made us wonder whether the house was inhabited, and a woman appeared. She was very neat and tidy, looked highly respectable, and wore a Normandy cap. We made our modest request known.

"Might we be allowed to see the château?"

She looked at us a moment, hesitated, then disappeared.

"No doubt gone to report," said H. C. "A very antiquated maiden; matches well with the antiquated building; even her cap scarcely makes her picturesque. Let us hope that she has great virtues; nature has her compensations. Here she comes again. We are

evidently to be admitted. We must have made a favourable impression upon her, and I see that if she is not beautiful she is discriminating. I esteemed her before, now I begin to like her."

For she appeared carrying a bunch of keys formidable enough to have been the very bunch with which the "Dougal Creature" escaped from the old tolbooth of Glasgow. One of these she inserted into the lock, and the gate swung wide.

"Would ces messieurs give themselves the trouble to enter? Mademoiselle de Pressensé would receive them."

We went into a charming and old-fashioned hall, and up an equally charming and old-fashioned staircase, with wide, shallow steps and dark oak panelling. "What a house for a poet," murmured H. C. "I wonder how old Mademoiselle is, and if she is inclined to change her condition, and whether she speaks a little English. It would be so awkward if we could not express our thoughts to each other."

We were ushered into a drawing-room which bore many signs of a feminine hand and influence and artistic feeling. A quaint old-fashioned room, with a large fire-place and latticed windows. The ceiling was low, and raftered with old oak beams. Easy chairs stood invitingly about, small sketches on easels, drawn with considerable skill.

In a few minutes a portière opposite the door by which we had entered was agitated, and the lady of the house stood before us. H. C.'s matrimonial projects were immediately put to flight. The lady was of an age to have been his mother. Yet she was very charming, very courteous; as much so as Mdlle. Martin, but with a high-bred air that that lady did not pretend to. We were at home at once, for she was one of those women of tact and cultivation who immediately put people at their ease. We no longer felt intruders.

She politely bade us be seated, and, after a short conversation, offered us the refreshment of wine and cake, just as if we had been old acquaintances. It was done in the true spirit of hospitality, and though we declined the attention we felt it had not been offered merely for form's sake.

"I fear," she said presently, "that you will be a little disappointed in the ruins, which are behind my house and are part of my property, and which I shall have much pleasure in showing you. Compared with them, this house, ancient though it be, is modern. It was once more interesting than it is now, for we have had to alter it here and there, and some rooms are merely papered that once were panelled. But we have changed as little as possible."

"It is very charming," said H. C. "Quite the abode of a poet."

"Perhaps Monsieur is himself a poet," said Mademoiselle, evidently remarking the large dreamy eyes and thoughtful brow which poets have always been credited with, but have by no means always possessed.

H. C. was too modest to reply except by blushing, too truthful to deny the soft impeachment.

"It is a great power," said Mademoiselle, taking silence for consent. "To be a poet was once my ambition, but I have not the gift. I sketch, but my sister has done most of these"—indicating those around, which betrayed talent almost amounting to genius. H. C.'s enthusiasm was too genuine to be mistaken.

"I see that Monsieur has the true artistic nature," said Mademoiselle, with animation. "It is, after all, one of our best gifts, for then nature speaks to us as she cannot speak to those who are without it. She has secrets for us, and beauties and delights that only the favoured can discover. Look at the sea," she continued, warming with her subject, and approaching the window, "it is ever changing and beautiful; in sunshine it sparkles and dances, and speaks to one of Heaven and Eternity; and when the winds roar and the tempest rages, and it lashes itself into fury, what an emblem of the power of the Creator, of the judgment awaiting the wicked—the Great Day of His Wrath; and of the Divinity of Him who by His word changed the raging water to a great calm."

It was indeed lovely as we gazed from this latticed window. The blue of the sky was reflected upon the surface of the sea, on which the sunshine sparkled and shimmered. Small fishing boats moving about passed in and out of the golden pathway. Far away stretched the coast towards Montmartin and Granville. In shore, the advancing tide rolled smoothly over the beach. The vessels lying on their sides were sharply outlined against the sky, groups of boys surrounding them.

"Life here is a daily poem," said Mdlle. de Pressensé, with quiet enthusiasm. "We have the everlasting sea before us, to remind us of eternity; and we have the ruins of a bygone age behind us, as an emblem of the truth that everything in this world submits to the inevitable law of change and decay. Let us go and see them."

We went down, first being taken by Mdlle. into her dining-room. Here, at least, antiquity had not been interfered with. A beautiful oaken ceiling, carved and divided into sections, arrested the eye. The walls were panelled, and the designs were rich yet simple; antique furniture of the sixteenth century added to the grave dignity of the room. It was long and low. At the end an oriel window, with latticed panes, looked out upon the ever-moving sea. A huge fire-place, black with age, massively carved and supported by Caryatides, sent H. C. into perfect raptures.

"How poor and commonplace, how unrefined and undignified, all that is modern seems in comparison!" he exclaimed. "I should like to pass my life in such a room as this. And, with the sea for nature and the shore for walking and contemplation, it would indeed be Paradise!"

Then our hostess, for the moment gratified by our delight, and

looking as if she would like to adopt H. C. and make him her heir, passed from the house into the garden.

Immediately before us rose the ruins of a bygone castle, but of which few vestiges now remain. Columns of broken masonry, tall and strong and massive; staircases up which an army might have passed; walls marking the boundaries, crumbling and ivy-grown; deep cavities suggestive of subterranean dungeons and passages, tortures and secret deeds of horror and bloodshed, such as a far-gone age delighted in, before the softening influence of Christianity had

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subdued the heart of man and changed the disposition of nations.

At the side of the ruins, separated by a narrow road, was a small, not very interesting, church of the fourteenth century. Behind all were ancient ramparts, once far higher than now, up which one climbed by the aid of steps a yard deep. The view from the summit was magnificent. The whole surrounding country, the sparkling sea, the village, the ruins at our feet, lay mapped before us. Mdlle. de Pressensé had accompanied us. On her head reposed nothing but a cap of rich old Flanders lace, the lappets fluttering as she walked. It added to the charm of the very comely and kindly and refined face beneath it, which was protected from the sun by the parasol she carried. Her dignified form was simply clad in a robe of rich black silk, the train

gracefully gathered up and thrown over her arm. Everything depends upon the way in which things are done. The same action in two different people may charm in the one case and irritate in the other.

"You see," said Mdlle., "how favoured we are in our surroundings. I cannot contemplate life in a crowded city: no repose, no time for thought; all one's days taken up by the claims of society—a frivolous influence and atmosphere in which it seems to me very difficult to save one's soul."

"You are indeed favoured," said H. C. "I who live much in the great world of London can testify to the truth of your remark. I grow weary of the life—the constant whirl and daily round—until at last I have to fly to some far-off moor or quiet nook of the earth, where the mind gradually regains its balance and the spirit its tone."

The conversation was fast verging on the poetical and sentimental, and it would be well for H. C. to depart before the mood became too strong to be restrained. I did not care to be treated to an "Ode to Antiquity" in twenty stanzas of ten lines each on my return to Coutances, an infliction I had more than once had to endure in Majorca. Besides which we had already trespassed too much on Mdlle. de Pressensé's goodness; though it had seemed a decided pleasure to her to receive us and to do the honours of her house, which she performed with such quiet ease and charm. It was time to withdraw; the more so that the sun was declining, the shadows were lengthening, and we wished to make our "rentrée" in daylight.

We therefore thanked Mademoiselle for her kindness and courtesy, as we wended our way back with her through the ruins to her house, and she escorted us as far as the outer gate. There we bade her farewell, feeling that a more intimate acquaintance would have been a privilege: that she was one of those true women who ennoble those they honour with their friendship.

Our driver had departed for rest, gossip and refreshment to the inn so suggestive of smuggling, and which rejoiced in the sign of "Au bords de la mer." We saw him in the distance in the height of bliss and enjoyment, drinking beer and surrounded by a group of idle but admiring villagers. We went down to the end of the little pier, and onward to where the sea was rolling up, and joined the boys in the inspection of the vessels; boys who immediately transferred their curiosity and attention to ourselves. The latest novelty is the greatest attraction.

And then we went and disturbed our driver in his happiness—he was no doubt as much in his paradise as we had been in ours—and departed. A cloud had suddenly partially obscured the sky, and rain fell, whilst the sun still shone in full power. We looked behind us, and suddenly a magnificent rainbow, the most vivid we had ever seen, framed-in the whole sea and landscape in a perfect half-circle of gorgeous colouring. It was unexpected, and one of the most

glorious effects conceivable, to which no one but a Turner could have done justice. But there was no Turner living; there never will be again; any more than there will be a Shakespeare or a Beethoven or a Michel Angelo; and so when it all faded, it faded for ever.

The drive back to Coutances had something of sadness in it, for it was—for the present—our last drive in Normandy, and all last things are sad, as emblematical of the great and final LAST. It had been a charming and delightful afternoon, full of experiences in a small way, giving one much to think of and to remember. We had made acquaintance with various types of human nature: Monsieur Marcel, Mdlle. Martin, Receveuse des Postes de Retraite and lady-in-chief of the village of Grâce; a gentlewoman by nature, and with something of a pedigree also. Lastly, Mdlle. de Pressensé, not more a gentlewoman at heart than Mdlle. Martin, but more a woman of the world, of greater privileges, of higher breeding, of deeper reading and cultivation. There are vessels of silver and vessels of gold, both perfect in their degree and kind.

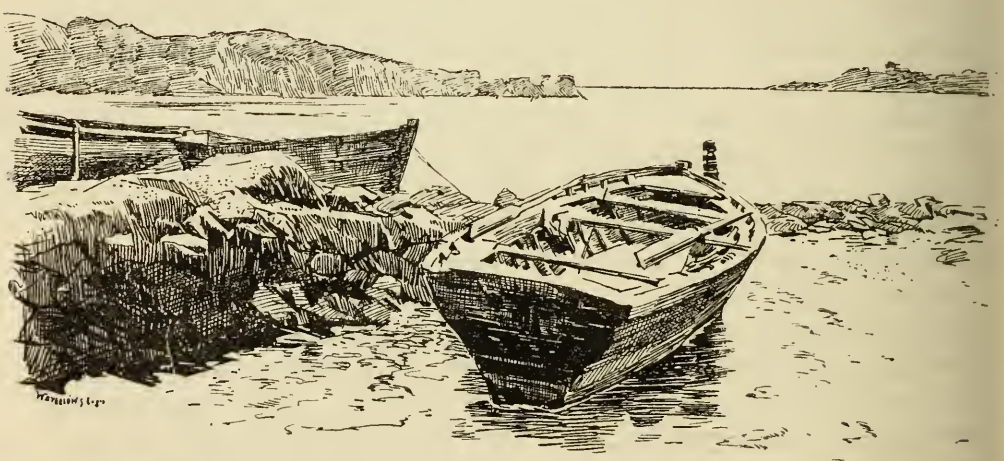
It was, for the time being, our last drive in Normandy. It might be our very last, for who could tell if we should ever return? So we made the most of it; the green fields and the hedges, and the long by-roads, the way-side cottages and the little villages. But only one village could boast its Mdlle. Martin; there could not be another like her within a very wide radius. She and Monsieur Marcel ought to espouse each other; they are exactly suited one to the other; she would only have to change one syllable of her name; and he would not have the trouble of calling for his pension. I say they ought to marry; but who knows? perhaps they have done so. All this took place a year ago; and in a year the face of the world might change; dynasties rise and fall, the course of the Gulf Stream be diverted, and we back again in the ice-age. So that two people, "if so disposed," would have ample time for entering the bonds of matrimony, and continuing the journey of life hand in hand; making this "wale of tears," as Mrs. Gamp would call it, no longer a pilgrimage but a paradise.

And only one spot could boast of its Mdlle. de Pressensé; of that we felt assured; and the singular thing about it was that we should have made acquaintance with these remarkable people in one and the same day, so that it became memorable to us for ever after. Mesmerism or Odic Force, or some unknown power of attraction must have been at work for us; or the stars were in happy conjunction. It is not always so.

To-day all was in our favour. Our skies were not only full of sunshine—even the rainbow gilded them; such a rainbow as we both declared we had never seen. As we entered Coutances, the shades of night were gathering; a pale star shone in the east; the cathedral bells were ringing out upon the air; the old women in the

market place had disappeared; the building itself looked grander and more noble, more magnificent, every time we returned to it. Like a thing of genius, the more we became familiar with its details the more we saw its charms and loved them. For the work of genius is inexhaustible, and each fresh acquaintance with it discloses even merits already discovered and dwelt upon in a new light. The truth is that we are affected according to our moods. It is not caprice or uncertainty, or halting between two opinions; but the varying moods and tenses of the human mind, as inevitable as the changes in a landscape, as uncontrollable as the changes on the ocean. And as we feel at the moment, so we see.

So we dashed into Coutances for the last time. Once more, having an interval before table d' hôte, we went up to the cathedral for a last look at the interior by night. It was wonderfully impressive,



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with its great expanse, its lights and shadows, its few kneeling figures. Much of it was lost in a mysterious gloom. Silence reigned. It might all have been an animated world turned into stone. No sad boy's face haunted us, as on a previous occasion: the most mournful and despairing we had ever seen. Instead we seemed to see a trio of faces belonging to those who were leading healthier and therefore happier lives: playing their little part in the world, doing their best, fighting their battle, meeting and resisting temptation, doing good to their fellow-mortals. The face of the old soldier, who was still hale and upright in spite of his grey locks and nearly sixty years; the image of Mdlle. Martin, tripping across the road and approaching us with her welcome, and lightly passing between the flower-beds of her garden; her contented mind and earnestness of purpose shining out of her soft brown eyes. And the dignified form of Mdlle. de Pressensé as she received us with a nameless grace, and stood at her latticed window looking on to the ever-changing sea. She had proved herself a

poet in thought and mind, though the power of expression may have been denied her. But she had at least the next best gift, that of appreciation. Many a poet there is in the world in heart and mind who cannot record the thoughts that move his soul.

These forms and faces were more wholesome, less depressing, than that of the poor young recluse of La Trappe, consigning the life given him by God to an endless imprisonment; throwing away all hope, all happiness, all power of serving and of being served; dragging out an existence full of pain and sorrow; and, it may be, full of remorse and unavailing regret.

No; to-night our aisles and arches were not ghost-haunted. We had seen too much of life's realities in the last few hours: the better and happier side of existence, wherein man is content to labour until the evening, as he was meant to do.

Very deep were the shadows as we left the cathedral; very impressive was the silence. We lingered and lingered. Who does not know how hard it is to take a last look at these wonderful and beautiful buildings, and *make* it the last? Again and again we look, and retrace our footsteps, and halt before every striking effect. But the very last look must come to all, and it came to us. We passed away from it, but we shall never forget it. The very streets seemed sacred because they dwelt beneath its shadow.

It was our last night in Normandy. On the morrow we were to start on our way to Brittany, where new experiences awaited us; a different race; an unknown tongue. We had spent many happy days here; would they be continued? There was much to admire and love: not only a beautiful country, but interesting people; in many parts a fine, well-made, handsome race, bold and fearless and honest. We had met with much kindness and even hospitality; and the greed of gain, so often one's experience in travelling, was often conspicuous by its absence—a rare virtue in these days.

The morrow came and we departed. The rattling omnibus took us down the steep hill to the station; and we had hardly arrived there before the waiter appeared by a short cut, breathless and excited, bringing a book of "Lyrics" and a sunflower which H. C. had left behind him.

Very soon we were steaming along as quickly as a Norman railway ventures to travel. Fair Normandy was passing away.

Yet we still had new scenes before us: the delights of Hope. They are a strange mixture of Pleasure and Pain, which ever go hand in hand. It is best so. A sunny landscape is made more beautiful by its shadows, and man's nature is elevated and refined by the discipline of sorrow.

IN HIS UNAVOIDABLE ABSENCE.

IT can hardly be necessary to remind any student of recent political history that in Mr. Friars White the constituency of South-West Ham had secured a Member of Parliament after its own heart. Mr. White had been a merchant, on a limited scale, in the North Countree, and had become tolerably well off; and had married a lady whose face was not her sole fortune; so that as far as pounds, shillings and pence went, he was thoroughly qualified to support the dignity of membership, and pay the Returning Officer's modest charges. But of course it was not because of such matters as these that South-West Ham had elected him as its Buff Representative. Mr. Friars White was an excellent and ready speaker. He had a shrewd wit and a rather caustic tongue, and his views were extremely advanced. The Socialists claimed him as one of themselves; and the claim had never been disallowed.

In the House of Commons, strange to say, this political luminary was listened to with a good deal of appreciation. Members who hated his opinions liked the man, who at bottom was a good sociable fellow enough; and they liked his power of putting a case shortly, pithily, and wittily. However much bunkum he was in the habit of pouring out on his constituents, he tempered the supply to the shorn lambs at St. Stephen's, and took good care to say what he had to say inoffensively, but with a liberal infusion of pungent epigram. He was a man whom political meetings liked to get hold of, for the simple reason that he could always be counted upon to make the dry bones of politics live, and his audience laugh and feel serenely satisfied with themselves. What more could be wanted in a speaker who did not pretend to be a tremendous orator, only a useful party man?

But at Easter-time, one year, Mrs. Friars White came to the conclusion that her husband was fagged, and wanted change of air.

"Victoria Street Flats don't agree with you, dear," she announced at breakfast one morning; "this sleeplessness of yours will wear you out. Can't you manage to get sleep in the House?"

"I can when some men are speaking—the Attorney-General, for instance. He's a powerful soporific."

"Well, perhaps if he knew how important it is for you to get slumber, he would speak oftener."

The Member laughed.

"I ought to be able to stand late hours and London air for half-a-year. Lots of people have to put up with it for the whole twelvemonth. My constituents, for example."

"Oh, that is the suburbs—not so much smoke. Besides, *they* go to bed at reasonable hours."

"Some of the men employed at the gas works are up all night all the year round; they sleep in the day. I should like to make the shareholders take a turn at it," quoted this Reformer.

"Well, it's the same with railways: some trains run at night, don't they? And you know *we* have shares in the Great North-Eastern."

Mr. Friars White did not see how to answer this last argument, and, besides, hated discussions with his wife, who was as strong a Blue as he was a Buff. So he turned to discuss his poached eggs instead.

"When do you go to the House to-day?" asked his affectionate spouse.

"Oh, there's an abominable Committee I am on. I must drive down by twelve."

"Very well. On the way I shall drive you to see a good brain doctor. I don't like your insomnia." And Mr. Friars White submitted humbly to his fate.

The doctor's pronouncement was rather startling. Dr. Plumptre had early in his career come to the conclusion that a medical man, to succeed in his profession, must be one of three things: either exceedingly learned and skilful, the possessor of captivating manners—especially to ladies—or a thorough-going alarmist. He knew he had no manners, and not more than average ability, so he determined to get a reputation by frightening patients. He had done so systematically for years, thus flattering the acumen of those who consulted him, and at the same time winning golden opinions by the speedy cure which he effected in cases which were—according to him—not merely serious, but profoundly dangerous. And now he was somewhere near the top of the profession; so that when he announced in a grave voice to Mr. and Mrs. Friars White that the former was suffering from the preliminary symptoms of undoubted cerebro-spinal paralysis in a sub-acute form, and that the best thing for him to do would be to throw up all work for a time and go to Homburg, the patient stared, the patient's wife gasped, and the doctor was the only one of the party who remained perfectly cool and collected.

"Do you really mean that there is any—any danger?" said poor Mrs. Friars White, in a horrified whisper.

"There is always danger when the cerebro-spinal system is involved," was the comforting reply. The doctor did, however, condescend to say that he thought Mr. Friars White would be quite cured in a short time if he carefully carried out the instructions given him.

"He should go to Homburg with some cheerful *male* companion—no disrespect to you, madam, but in these cases change of scene *and* society is essential. He should be put into an entirely new world, as it were."

"How long must he remain absent from me?"

"Till he is pronounced by the doctor to whom I shall recommend him at Homburg to be so well that he can safely return."

When they got away from the doctor's sanctum, Mr. Friars White, who felt almost well, took the matter very coolly.

"See what your old fogey views have let you in for!" he laughed; "now if you had chosen a young man of the newer medical lights to pronounce on me, ten to one he would have ordered me to Folkestone."

But the subject was too serious to jest about for Mrs. Friars White; and in the course of a few days a suitable companion was found, and it was announced in the papers that "acting under medical advice, Mr. Friars White, M.P. for South-West Ham, had gone to Homburg for a few weeks." Also that in his unavoidable absence all communications for him addressed to Number Three, Adelaide Mansions, Victoria Street, S.W., would "be attended to by his secretary." His secretary was his wife. She was a clever woman, and rather looked forward to the prospect of manufacturing diplomatic answers to the busybodies who consider "a Member" their legitimate prey. She had, however, not quite counted upon the reception of political appeals addressed to herself personally.

About three weeks after the British M.P. had fled Homburgwards in search of health, and when his attached wife's anxieties on his account had been already considerably allayed by the excellent reports of his condition, which he forwarded with great punctuality—with interesting details of how many hours he slept, what a quantity of food he was able to consume, and how generally "fit" he felt—the porter of the flat brought up to the private door of the Friars Whites' apartments a quite unparalleled and unprecedented communication.

It was a letter contained in a dirty envelope from the "Chorlton and District Ultra-Buff Club," and, to Mrs. White's surprise, it was addressed not to her husband, but to her.

"Why don't they write to the secretary, as he told them to do?" she said to herself. "Another proof of Buff bad manners, I suppose!"

But when she opened the envelope and read the contents, she saw that there were no bad manners at all in the case. And it was not a male secretary, it was herself, her feminine self, that the Chorltonites desired to address, and addressed with considerable command of language and much apparent assurance of success. This was the letter:—

"Honoured Madam,—We, the officers of this recently-established association for diffusing useful political knowledge among the voters in this increasing district, of which your husband, Mr. Friars White, M.P., is partly the representative" ('*partly* the representative!' thought Mrs. White. 'Oh! They mean that Chorlton is part of

the South-West Ham District, I suppose'), "have heard with regret of his enforced abstention from Parliamentary duties. In consequence of the warm interest which he has always taken in this club, we venture to ask you, madam, as his lady" ('lady!' sniffed Mrs. Friars White; 'why can't they say wife, while they are about it?'), "to give them a lecture next Saturday evening at eight o'clock" ('Good gracious!' Mr. Friars White's lady could not help exclaiming). "The Club would be delighted to hear Mrs. Friars White on any part of the Ultra-Buff Programme" ('I don't think they *would*,' she thought to herself), "and have no wish to limit her choice of subjects. They would suggest that something sprightly on the state of trade, showing the absolute necessity of a Buff Cabinet in England replacing the present corrupt and nefarious ministry, would be much relished. Would Mrs. Friars White kindly wire her subject, as time presses, and it is usual to announce the lecture some days beforehand?"

Then followed the names of the vice-president, secretary, and treasurer, together with a printed list of the lectures for the past month.

"Ah! My husband's President of the wretched club, I see," observed his dutiful wife. "How on earth a sensible man like him can—but there! I've given up trying to reclaim him as a bad job."

"They seem to take it for granted," she went on, after perusing the invitation again, "that I shall accept. They almost *order* me to 'wire my subject.' I'm really half afraid that it will damage poor Tom (Tom was Mr. Friars White) in the constituency if I *don't* attend." She was so dutiful a wife that the thought was very unpleasant. Indeed, she found herself almost wishing that she could be converted to her husband's views in time for the Saturday performance. Then she became suddenly indignant at the coolness of the Chorlton people in assuming that her opinions must necessarily agree with those of her spouse. "They seem to regard us women as mere slaves! I *should* like to go to the meeting, just to say something about Women's Rights." And Mrs. Friars White pondered.

A happy thought struck her. She clapped her hands, gave a triumphant little laugh, and her well-cut lips wore a smile of self-satisfaction as she walked several times up and down the room, and at length came to anchor at the window, with its view of omnibus garden seats and horses, and crowds hurrying along the white-looking pavements, and in the distance the gilded top of the Victoria Tower just seen over the opposite house-roof.

"I think I can manage it. It will need careful preparation, though." And so saying, she sat down at her escritoire, took out a telegraph form, and wrote on it these words: "Will lecture Saturday next on 'British Industry, Why it is Depressed'—Emily Friars White." She addressed it to the secretary of the club, rang the bell, and the important engagement was made.

"How my husband would laugh if he knew of it!" she said to the escritoire, confidentially. "I mustn't say anything to injure *him*. And I won't give up one of my real opinions." So thinking, she sat down at once, like a good little business woman as she was, and began there and then to write down the "heads" of her coming discourse.

Meanwhile the invalid legislator at Homburg was feeling very much better. So much better in fact that he had come to the conclusion that Dr. Plumptre was a humbug, and that his cerebro-spinal system had never been affected in any way. He had just received an urgent reminder by his party "Whip" that the important division on Free Oatmeal Porridge in Scotch Elementary Schools was expected on Friday night, and that as a number of Government supporters were known to be friendly to the proposal, there seemed a very good chance of defeating the ministry. Could not Mr. Friars White, who had not been able to "pair," just run over from Homburg for the division and run back again?

"I don't know about running back again," he thought. But he made up his mind that he was well enough to run over, and he determined to give his wife a pleasant little surprise by not announcing his expected arrival beforehand.

It was decidedly cold and blowy weather for the time of year, and by the time that Mr. Friars White had arrived at Dover he was heartily repenting of his folly in leaving comfortable Homburg and its ever-bright Untere Promenade and park when he was not absolutely obliged. His continental train to town was even later than is the recognised privilege of the service, and he thought he would drive straight to the House—as it was now seven o'clock—and see how things were going there, before presenting himself at the domestic flat. The first person he met in the Lobby was his old friend Captain Carruthers, Member for a mining constituency in the North. The Captain was delighted to welcome him back.

"You're looking as well as possible," he declared. "What's been the matter?"

"Oh," said the other, vaguely, not wishing to go into cerebro-spinal particulars, "old Plumptre, of Harley Street, you know, ordered me away; over-work, he said. I believe he's a quack; anyhow, I'm all right again now. And I'm in time for this division to-night."

"Division! what division?" asked the Captain.

"Why! Isn't the great division on the Free Oatmeal resolution coming on to-night?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed the Captain. "Anybody can see *you've* been abroad. Why, it was arranged last night that the Oatmeal debate should be adjourned till next week—such a lot of people want to talk on it—it was in this morning's papers."

"I haven't seen one," said Mr. Friars White, feeling very much

sold. "I'll make it hot for the Whips; they've fetched me over on purpose."

In reply to this observation the Captain winked, coughed meaningly, and at last broke into one of his hearty laughs again.

"Don't try and deceive an old bird, White, like me!" he said. "It's a little domestic whip that's brought *you* back so soon. Ah, sly dog!"

"I don't know what you mean!" He really didn't.

"Oh, of course you haven't heard about your wife! I saw it to-day in the announcements in the *Daily Mercury*, or *I* shouldn't have known."

"Saw what?" asked the puzzled Member.

"Come now, White," said the Captain, "I believe you know perfectly well that your good wife is lecturing this evening on depressed British industries at the Chorlton Ultra-Buff Club, and that you're on your way there at this moment."

"My—wife—lecturing—at a—at a Buff Club! She's a high and dry Blue! What *do* you mean?"

"What I say," replied the Captain.

Mr. Friars White said good-bye hastily and tore off to the library. He consulted three different newspapers. In each of them he found the announcement of the lecture. Then he rushed off to his flat. His wife was not at home!

At that moment Mr. Friars White, who had never doubted his spouse before, began seriously to fear that her unfortunate convictions might have got the better of her, and that her conscience might have driven her off to Chorlton to try and convert his constituents from the error of their ways. She might ruin him—politically speaking! He knew she was very clever, and could speak.

"There's only one thing to be done," he said to himself. "I must follow her."

There were two things to be done, however. The first was to swallow a hasty meal. Then he summoned a cab and drove off to Charing Cross, and caught a train which would land him within a mile of that remote district.

On his way down—he was in a first-class carriage and a bit of a temper—he bethought himself that though his wife's behaviour was certainly scandalous, he could not, for his own sake as well as hers, disgrace her by appearing on the platform and publicly disagreeing with her. He would try and see her before the lecture began. If not, he would attempt to hear the lecture without being recognised by any of his constituents, and he would not interfere unless he were driven to it.

Of course, as the day of the lecturing ordeal had drawn near, Mrs. Friars White had become more and more nervous. She was not intended by nature as a "political woman," and in going alone to speak to an East End working-class audience she realised what

Daniel felt before his introduction to the lions' den. That morning she had awoke with the vague assurance in her mind that something disagreeable was to take place. "Oh, Chorlton!" she said with a groan, as the full extent of her liabilities flashed on her brain. Yet "honour called" in the Chorlton direction, and she was much too plucky to give way at the eleventh hour.

She might have sent an excuse if she had known the exact conditions under which these weekly lectures took place. The Chorlton Buffs met in a large room on the first floor of a public-house, and they were democratic enough to smoke and drink beer out of pewter pots while the lecture was proceeding.

It must be admitted that on this occasion the lady lecturer was received by the officers of the club with all due politeness, as befitted the wife of "our Member." She was shown into an improvised cloak-room to begin with, and then the vice-president suggested "a little refreshment."

"We have tea on the primisis," added the secretary.

"And Bovril—and beer," said the treasurer, who was proud of the resources of the club. The secretary frowned at him, and the vice-president gave him a dig in the ribs to show the crass untimeliness of his offer of beer to a lady. Mrs. Friars White rejected all these offers, rather to the embarrassment of the officers, who knew the lecture-room was only half filled, and did not want the lecturer to see the nakedness of the land. So they beguiled five minutes with talk. The vice-president said what a cold day it had been, and hoped Mrs. Friars White had enjoyed good health, unlike her respected husband. The secretary said they had the "nuclus" of a "good libery" at the club. The treasurer was beginning a sentence as to the willingness of the club-men to receive gifts of books from "parties so disposed," when he was privately kicked by the secretary and drowned in a loud remark of the vice-president's as to the certainty of Mr. Friars White's majority at next election being "at least three 'underd above the figure last time." At which Mrs. Friars White said that her husband would be very pleased to hear it (though *she* wasn't), and wished to goodness the vice-president would lead her at once into the execution chamber and put her out of her pain.

He did so at last. At the entrance of the lady and her three male attendants there was a good deal of stamping of feet and rapping of pewters on deal tables. Mrs. Friars White caught sight of the pewters—of the carpetless floor—of the men with clay pipes in their mouths—she smelt the tobacco—and for one moment she thought of flight. The sight of a few women present—wives and sweethearts of members—somewhat reassured her; and she ascended the platform with the same sort of desperation with which soldiers charge a battery. Would these horny-handed toilers detect a Blue when they saw one? And if so, would she be torn limb from limb? At the further end of the room there was an alcove or little transept, comparatively in

shadow. To this place visitors not admitted to the privileges of membership were ushered; and this part of the room was well filled. There were two rather ragged men, fast asleep, propped up against a wall at the end of their respective benches. There were others listening attentively to all that passed. There were a few giggling girls. An old gentleman with a wooden leg and an umbrella banged both on to the floor at regular intervals by way of applause. And there was a stranger in a pot hat, and with his great-coat collar turned up round his neck, smoking like a chimney, so that it was really almost impossible to see one of his features.

And the lecture itself? It was a masterly performance. It was a very clever and caustic travesty of all the arguments usually heard at such gatherings, and the Chorltonites took it all as deadly and most serious earnest.

"I feel quite certain," said Mrs. Friars White, in her pleasant, clear tones, "that the enlightened members of this club will quite expect me to start from the central point of all political discussion, that whatever happens that is good and beneficial to the country is due to the party which the club supports, and that whatever is wrong is due to a dastardly and effete government." Loud applause greeted this elementary proposition, showing that the lecturer had rightly apprehended the wishes of her audience.

She then proceeded to describe the various undesirable points in the circumstances of the country, and ascribed them all to the same cause. Railway rates, foreign competition, immigration of pauper aliens, even wet seasons, were placed at the door of "Her Majesty's present advisers," in the good old-fashioned way so dear to both parties when out of power, so resented by both when in power. She came at last, and towards the end of the discourse, to a point at which the "disastrous cabinet that now rules England" was held indirectly responsible for the "sad prevalence of rats in haystacks."

There was a crash. Mrs. Friars White started, fearing at first that she had been seen through, and that some outraged hearer had thrown a boot at her head. It was only the muffled up stranger at the end of room, whose pipe had dropped heavily on the boarded floor.

The stranger seemed conscience-stricken at his own clumsiness, for he rose slowly from his bench (chairs were unknown) and left the room, after one parting glance cast at the platform.

Soon after, the lecture ended amid tempests of applause. The members rose and swung pipes and pewters round their heads, hurrahing wildly. The two ragged paupers woke up and cheered vaguely. The old gentleman almost broke his wooden leg in stamping his enthusiasm. The wives looked jealous, and the girls forgot to giggle. A cordial vote of thanks was given to the lecturer. There was usually a discussion, but as the chairman remarked, "the lecture had been unanswerable, and discussion would be superflus."

When Mrs. Friars White got home—which did not happen till eleven o'clock—she was very tired, but rather elated with her experience. She was sure she had not injured her husband in his constituency. She was certain her audience had no idea that she had "spoke sarcastic." And she had not deserted one of her opinions. She opened the door of the drawing-room, and saw a gentleman seated in an arm-chair, his back turned towards her. He faced round—and she perceived the Homburg patient! She rushed to his arms.

"Tom! You here. When in the name of goodness did you come back?"

"Only this afternoon, dearest."

"And why—oh, why? You are not worse?"

"On the contrary—I am perfectly well."

"I am *so* delighted. Do you feel *quite* strong? You must be *very* tired after your journey."

"Not at all. In fact I have been out for two or three hours since I came back."

"Where, dear?"

"At a lecture. And you?"

"Oh—er—well—I have been out on business."

"Shopping, I suppose. Evidently they don't believe in early closing where *you* make your purchases. And are all your opinions just the same as before I went away? I have the greatest respect for your views—you express them so pungently."

What *could* he mean?

"Of course the central point from which we have to start—I mean, from which *I* have to start, not you—is that everything that is right is due to the Opposition, and everything that goes wrong is the fault of the Government."

A thrill of horrified surprise passed through his wife.

"From railway rates to wet seasons," went on the invalid, quite placidly, "it's all due to the Cabinet, isn't it?"

Why did Mrs. Friars White at this moment suddenly remember the muffled up stranger on the back benches who had dropped his pipe? Who knows? Yet she certainly did.

"Even the rats in haystacks," he was beginning again, when she rushed across the room to him, put his hand on his mouth, and with a half-hysterical shriek exclaimed—

"Tom! *How* did you know about it?"

He looked down smilingly on her face and said:

"*Because I was there!*"

H. F. Lester.

MORE ABOUT SNAKES.

THE process of hibernating generally occurs in India during the cold weather, which—incredible as it may sound to some ears—is sufficiently cold to cause water to freeze in the night.

It is at this time that snakes are less active and less visible than during the hot season, concealing themselves in the hollow trunks of trees, in holes in the ground, and similar localities; here they lie, snugly coiled up, covered with leaves till "the winter is past." Unable to burrow, they enter through the holes formed by a rat, or some other small animal, and remain securely hidden in the cavity. It is by no means unusual for "coolies," or labourers, when employed in digging, or in breaking down banks, to unearth a nest of snakes comfortably hatching their eggs. I relate further on a curious discovery of this nature.

So much has been said about the cobra that it may not be uninteresting to record the legend respecting the origin of the mark—the "spectacles," as it is called—by which it is distinguished from all others of its tribe.

One day, when Buddha was lying asleep in the sun, a cobra came and raised its body between him and the burning beams, spreading its hood so as to shade his face. The grateful Deity promised to repay the favour, but forgot to do so. In those days the Brahminy kite used to prey largely on the cobra, and worked such devastation among them that the individual who had done Buddha the forgotten service ventured to remind him of his promise, and to beg relief from the attacks of the kite. Buddha immediately granted the request by placing these marks on the snake's hood, and thereby frightening the kite so much that it has never since ventured to attack a cobra.

I have already in a previous article mentioned a trait of my favourite Persian cat, Venus; let me record another anecdote of her.

One piping-hot afternoon I lay me down after tiffin on the couch in my sitting-room, hoping to indulge in a delicious siesta. It was intensely hot. I could hear the waves, five miles distant, beating on the coast, and, looking out through the venetians, I could see the heated air quivering from the earth. All nature seemed to succumb to the fierce heat, and I too yielded, wooing the "balmy maid" to close my eyes.

I had slept for half-an-hour when I was disturbed by the sound of scratching on the matting of an adjoining empty bedroom. As the noise prevented my sleeping I got up to see what was the matter, and found Venus hard at work with her claws in a corner of the chamber. Thinking it was only a freak of her ladyship, I somewhat

angrily drove her away, and lay down again to sleep. In a short time I was again disturbed by the noise, and am sorry to say I spoke somewhat roughly to Venus, and smote her with my hand.

For a third time I lay down, making sure that now I should have a comfortable snooze; but no! for a third time I was disturbed by Venus going through the same performance. I determined to inquire into this strange behaviour, and, lifting up the corner of the matting, discovered a large snake about four feet long coiled up beneath it!

Gently replacing the matting, I left the snake in charge of Venus, while I procured a stick, and, with a few well-laid strokes and after a short struggle, despatched it. But what had brought it there? Well, in that identical corner of the room had been placed a bowl of milk, poor Pussy's beverage. It is a well-known fact that snakes have likewise a craving for the lacteal delicacy, and this unfortunate snake, scenting the sweet draught, and probably feeling somewhat dry, had drained it clean. Venus, wishing to slake her thirst this hot afternoon, made for her milk but found it gone, and her peculiar instinct enabled her to discover the thief—she was dead upon snakes! Pussy for a few moments gloated over the lifeless body of her foe, and was rewarded with a fresh basin of milk for having rid the house of another and a deadly enemy.

Poor Venus! it grieves me to relate that she came to an untimely end. In 1859 I left India for England, and gave Venus to a friend, not being able to take her with me. I heard afterwards that she always haunted the Parsonage, which fell into other hands. Nothing would induce her to leave her old home; and its inmates, either hating cats or seeing no beauty in her, heartlessly, cruelly, shot her! Poor Venus—to me you were ever beautiful and true, and I cherish your memory with real affection!

I was relating this story of Venus some years after at the dinner-table of a friend, now gone to his long home, when he turned to his niece and said, "Now E—, cap that story!" so she told the following incident, which, by the bye, I do not think "capped," or even came near, what I had related.

"Uncle and aunt and M— were staying with us at B—, and one evening after dinner we were all sitting as usual in the verandah, which was about fifty feet long and dimly lighted here and there with oil 'buttees.' Where we sat was a corner, furnished with carpets, chairs, a couch and a table, on which stood a bright lamp. M— and I were working, mother and aunt talking to father and uncle, who were smoking. Presently uncle said, 'Look there!' pointing to the further corner of the verandah, and we saw a large cobra glide from one side to the other, and disappear into the garden. Papa wished to go for the brute, but uncle said, 'Sit still, and don't be foolhardy.' The words were scarcely out of his mouth when a second cobra appeared, following the same track and disappearing

as did cobra number one. We none of us liked to move, but to our amazement another came, and another, till twelve cobras followed one another and vanished! We then thought it high time to beat a retreat. We could only suppose that it was a family migrating from one part of the garden to another; but in the morning no trace of them could be found, and though for a time they came uncomfortably close to us, we felt that our safety had lain in our 'masterly inactivity.'"

Did you ever see a snake's egg? Probably not. Well, imagine a whitey-brown leathery substance about three inches long, not quite so broad as a hen's egg, but soft and yielding to the touch—and you have before you the case which contains the venomous (or otherwise) creature which in life inspires so much loathing and horror.

A friend of mine was standing one day on the steps of the Masonic Hall (adjoining the Parsonage, but divided from it by a large Compound), when, to his surprise, a cobra crossed the path and glided into a hole beneath the step on which he stood. "By George," he thought, "I don't relish a cobra at such close quarters! This is uncomfortable."

The thought had hardly been breathed when a second cobra crossed the path and disappeared into the same hole. "Well," said my friend, "I am not going to stand this any longer," so, calling the "mallees" and servants, he made them break up the steps with pick and spade—and what a treasure they came upon! There were the two cobras, male and female, who, being disturbed, showed fight, but were speedily killed, and beneath them a nest of forty eggs! What a lively thought, that, if the discovery had not been made, in a few days forty more venomous brutes would have infested the premises! What was done with them? Well, the nest with its eggs was carefully lifted up and carried to the hospital close by, and presented to the house-surgeon as a curiosity. He, in his wisdom, preferred to get rid of them at once; so the whole was placed bodily into a cauldron of boiling water—not made into soup for the patients, but scotched and killed outright—a wholesale and wholesome destruction!

Though snakes are real foes, there are times when they become imaginary ones and the occasion is ludicrous.

Captain D—, his wife and family, were living in tents on the Maidan.

One evening, while dressing for dinner, he hastily pulled on his boot, but to his horror felt a soft clammy substance touching his foot. "A snake, by Jove!" was his exclamation; "what shall I do?" He was afraid to take his boot off lest the snake might turn and bite him, so his servant suggested that he should stamp his foot violently on the ground and kill the beast. No sooner said than done, and he felt, he said, the snake squashed to a pulp. "Now, boy, pull off my boot and let's see the brute!" Off came the boot,

but without sign of blood or snake. Gingerly the boy put his hand in, and pulled out—what? Master's bath-sponge, which one of his dear innocents had put into papa's boot to make him believe it was a "samp," or snake.

It is not everyone who has the courage or nerve to face a snake. Some persons are so terror-stricken that they adopt what is called the better part of valour, and get out of the way.

Let me narrate a lamentable instance which occurred at N—.

Two young officers had arranged, on the brigade holiday, to go into the jungle for sport, hoping to bag big game. They started early, unaccompanied by beaters—always a mistake.

They arrived at the jungle, six miles distant from camp, in about two hours, and separated; one dived into the jungle, the other and younger of the two followed a path or cart-track. After walking on for a time without meeting any game, he was surprised at seeing a cobra in the path, moving towards him. Never having seen one before, he was afraid to fire at it, so he came to a stand-still, hoping the cobra would pass into the jungle. But no! stealthily and steadily it moved towards him. He retreated a few steps, facing the snake, but still it advanced; he then turned and quickly retraced his steps for a few yards; still the cobra continued its onward progress, as if following him. Hereupon, an abject terror seized him; throwing away his gun, he ran till he arrived back in camp, breathless and exhausted. The intense fear and excitement, as well as the exposure to the burning sun, all told on the poor fellow. He became raving mad; no medical skill could save him, and he died in terror, believing the cobra was killing him.

It is easy to say, though somewhat difficult to act up to, but the best plan when facing a snake is to be self-possessed. The first impulse on seeing a snake is to hurry out of the way; but it is a fact worth knowing and remembering, that wild beasts and reptiles will, as a rule, turn and flee from human beings. If injured, of course they will turn upon you and strike; and then woe to your humanity, unless you have good weapons and can use them well! I have seen hundreds of cobras in my garden, and my approach caused them to slink away into the grass; but my advice is, Don't irritate them, for if they show fight, it is a matter of life or death for one of the two.

I was walking once by the seaside, carrying a gun, with the hope of shooting rabbits. The shore was covered with a thick weed which had its roots in the sandy soil, and made it rather difficult to progress; the leaves of the weed were of a thick, fleshy nature, a favourite food of rabbits.

Tramping along, with my gun under my arm, I became aware all at once of a huge black cobra springing out of a hole, and in a defiant manner disputing my way.

He was about three yards from me and I was, therefore, out of reach of his stroke. I remained perfectly motionless and hesitated

to fire, lest I should wound him, for then he might have the advantage of me, from the peculiar character of the ground; so, as I said, I stood perfectly still. For two or three minutes we looked at one another, the cobra swaying himself to and fro with a slight hiss. Then, with a parting hiss, he shut up his hood and disappeared into the hole. I made a détour and passed on safely, feeling that, under the circumstances, the wisest course had been "to let well"—or the snake—"alone."

I have given one instance of a snake fascinating its victim; let me give another; this time nearer home.

Some years ago when in England I spent a day at the "Zoo," and chanced to be in the reptile house at the snakes' feeding time. My attention was particularly arrested by a snake (not of the cobra species) which had a fine rock pigeon put into its cage for its meal. I determined to wait and witness the whole process—which lasted fully half-an-hour—from beginning to end.

The snake was coiled round the branch of a tree inside the cage, and the pigeon was pecking away at some grain placed before it. In a few minutes the snake uncoiled itself from the branch, and placed itself immediately facing the pigeon, which, as if heedless of its presence, continued to eat the grain. But as the moments passed it was evident that the pigeon knew what was in store for it! Whichever way it turned, at once the snake's face was in front of it, raised about six or eight inches from the ground, its long sharp tongue darting out and a low suppressed hiss being audible. Presently the poor bird's head and wings drooped altogether; it ceased to eat, and became as if paralysed. Then, with lightning rapidity, the snake made a spring, and coiled itself two or three times round the pigeon. Harder, tighter, closer grew the pressure, till the victim was crushed to death.

When the snake was assured of this it uncoiled itself, and the bird lay dead before it. Then followed a curious process of licking the body over with mucus, and after what appeared to be a somewhat painful effort, the pigeon disappeared, and, from the protuberance, its position could easily be defined in the belly of the snake. The latter, having glutted itself, resumed its former position round the branch of the tree, and there rested and slept till the process of digestion was over, when it would be ready for another meal.

One more feature regarding snakes I record for the benefit of those whom it may concern. It is said of St. Patrick, the Apostle of Ireland, that the greatest of his miracles was driving venomous reptiles out of Ireland, and rendering the Irish soil for ever after so obnoxious to the serpent race that they instantaneously die on touching it. Whether or no, an Irish gentleman, desiring to put the matter to the test, procured a few common English snakes, and pitched them into the country. Great was the consternation created by this audacious act! One of the unfortunate snakes was

soon taken and killed, and caused extraordinary alarm among the country-folks that a "rale living sarpint" should have been destroyed near the very burial-place of the saint! But, beyond this, it will scarcely be credited what wild and absurd rumours were circulated. One far-seeing clergyman denounced this wretched snake as heralding the Millennium; another saw in it the type of the approach of the cholera, while all sorts and conditions of men and women declared it to be the beginning of the end, though none could positively declare what that end was to be.

The more practical-minded set to work to find the remaining snakes, which, report says, were all discovered and killed, not without many dire anathemas against the misguided individual who had dared to introduce them into Ireland.

And now, let me conclude with a caution. The Devil, we are told, tempted Eve in the form of a serpent. Now "Diabolus" means a slanderer, and it strikes me also that the human genus "sneak" is not far removed from the reptile "snake." I would say to all honest-minded people—Beware of all such! Remember the proverb, "Latet anguis in herbâ!"

AUTUMN.

Low lines of leaden clouds sweep by
Across the gold sun and blue sky,
Which still are there eternally.
Over the sodden garden bed
Droop empty flower-stalks, dry and dead,
Where the tall lily bent its head
Over carnations white and red.

The leafless poplars, straight and tall,
Stand by the grey-green garden wall,
From which such rare fruit used to fall.
In the verandah, where of old
Sweet August spent the roses' gold,
Round the chill pillars, shivering, fold
Garlands of rose-thorns sharp with cold

And we, by cosy fireside, muse
On what the Fates grant, what refuse;
And what we waste, and what we use.
Summer returns—despite the rain
That weeps against the window pane.
Who'd weep—'mid fame and golden gain—
For youth, that does not come again?

E. Nesbit.

AN OLD BOYS' MATCH.

IT was the night following the second and last day of the Old Boys' Match.

My friend Abbott and I were looking out of the end window of "Studies," as the monitors' rooms and the passage between them were collectively called. This window, a rather high first-floor with a balcony, looking straight out over the cricket-field, was a favourite lounging-place. To-night, in consideration of the heat and the match festivities, old Ransome, the school porter, had obligingly forgotten to fasten up the window, and we stood on the balcony in the visible darkness of midsummer—for it was the last week in June.

The moon, a little past the full, was risen just high enough to shine over the buildings of Bromley's, our boarding-house, and light up the fields beyond, though we were in the shadow. We leaned against the balcony railing, chatting over the events of the match, while the bats flitted round and about (as before it grew dark we had seen the cockchafers round the turret above), and the goods trains at the distant station wheezed, whistled, and groaned over their shunting. We were both inclined to that half-melancholy, half-joyous mood which comes over us all, men and boys, when a festive summer day is done, and the world is left to darkness and to us.

We had gloriously beaten the Old Boys, and that although three or four of them were well-known members of distinguished county elevens (how is it, I wonder, that these great men take a beating from the youngsters so often and so cheerfully?), and our own personal share had been satisfactory enough, as I had made twenty-seven and caught two men, whilst Abbott behind the wicket had disposed of four in the two innings, and before it had made fifteen in the first innings and eighteen in the second, both times not out. I had only batted once, as we had won by six wickets.

"We were very lucky to get them out so easily, though," remarked Abbott, for about the eleventh time. "None of our bowlers are really up to much; they seem to come in anywhere after old Jim's steady ones."

"I should have thought Barter and Smith were rather faster than either the batsmen or you would like," I answered. "But he would have got the O. B.s out for half the runs, of course."

"Yes, and grumbled all the time he was in that he couldn't get the bowling, till the other fellows laughed so they couldn't bowl. Do you remember how savage he made the Ramblers the year before last, and old Murray growling 'Confound that fellow Brenton; can't get any bowling, indeed—doesn't deserve any if he pulls the first ball

of an over round for two,' and then shouts 'Come along, run three and bustle them!' like his cheek!"

"Old Brum" (Bromley, our tutor, and the great authority on cricket) "always said Jim was the most useful man on the side as soon as he took to hitting across. I wonder where he is now?"

For we two were the desolate remnant of an inseparable trio; only Jim Brenton had gone for a soldier as soon as age entitled him—length had done so long before—while we lounged away more than another year at school, with four at Cambridge in prospect. Jim had left school just before the previous summer term, and the loss of another school season, and the captaincy, had almost for the time damped his military ardour. We two survivors were closer friends since we had been left together, but Abbott and Brenton were without doubt the two original chums.

"I wonder where he is now?" I repeated, for Abbott had taken no notice of my remark.

"I can't remember the name of the place: in the Red Sea, somewhere, I think, where it's frightfully hot, and they keep coal—somewhere near the Tower of Babel Mandeb, I think." (Public schools still leave geography to the crammers, I fear.)

"What a row those fellows are making," said Abbott, as a festive song was heard in the distance. The Old Boys were evidently making a night of it at the "College Arms," a picturesque little hostelry, nearly as old as the college itself, which nestled among the trees beyond the cricket-ground. Another shout, and quiet resumed its sway. The clock on the school tower struck half-past eleven.

"I say, we'd better be making tracks for bed," said I. "If Brum comes up, he won't stand our being out here as late as this."

"Hullo!" said Abbott, irrelevantly—he was still gazing out into the night. "I say, Stanley, look here—are those sheep on the cricket-ground, or what? Good heavens, *who* are they, and what are they doing?"

A number of nondescript-looking figures, or rather objects, for their shape was scarcely discernible, were stealing out between the trees on to the cricket-ground. As they came nearer, we saw that they were not all white, as we had at first thought, but mostly black, and impish in their appearance. They came on towards the best part of the turf, and proceeded so far as we could see—yes, actually to pitch stumps, and prepare to play at cricket!

"It's the cads come out to play by moonlight," I cried, stamping with rage. "They'll cut up all the turf. What can we do?"

"Do! We'll go and turn them off," said Abbott. "I'll go and fetch Bruiser Elton" (a champion, mighty with fists and at football, though no cricketer); "he's always complaining he gets no fun this term."

"Go and turn them off. How on earth are we to get out?" I asked disconsolately.

"Why, look here," answered Abbott, developing suddenly the

powers of a constructive statesman of the highest order. "You go and fetch Elton. I'll shut up the window, to look as if Ransome had locked it. Then I'll make a little noise, and Brum will come up, and find everybody else gone to bed, and me just going. Then, when I whistle 'John Peel,' you scuttle down quietly, and we'll get little Thomas to watch for us. We'll let ourselves down with sheets, and he can haul them up and stow them in the balcony till they're wanted again. Put on dark coats, of course" (we were lounging in our eleven colours, as school magnates will); "and if those fellows only go on playing for twenty minutes or so, we'll give them a surprise fit to make them jump out of their skins. Cut along sharp, do!"

I flew upstairs, collected three sheets, and secured Elton, who, when his sleepiness was once overcome, entered into the plan with zest.

We soon heard the "little noise," consisting apparently of the upset of a suite of study furniture, including fender and fire-irons. Such a summons could scarcely be disregarded by a self-respecting tutor, and soon a measured step was heard coming upstairs. Brum always disdained creeping softly up. A few minutes more, "Good-night, sir," at the door of Studies, descending steps, and shortly after, the familiar strain of "John Peel," subdued in time and tone to a kind of mysterious midnight march, well befitting our enterprise.

We stole down, bringing with us from the lower passage, as we came, little Thomas, smallest, toughest, and most trustworthy of fags. He, but for his sorrow that he was not to accompany us, was delighted with his part of the duty. He begged hard to come too.

"No, Tommy," said Abbott; "you'll be extremely valuable here, and no use at all out there; and if you manage this job with your well-known tact and discretion" (Tommy grinned the grin of the experienced and diplomatic defier of law and order), "you shall have an hour with whichever professional you like, next week. There's bribery and corruption! Look here; pull up this sheet when we're gone—don't untie it"—he was knotting it skilfully as he spoke—"coil it in the balcony, and shut the window again all but an inch, as quietly as you can. Then go and sit in the end study, or here, if you like, as long as you don't get caught—and when you hear the whistle, open the window, chuck the sheet down, and when I say all right, cut straight to your room, and don't wait for us, in case of Brum. We'll tell you all about it afterwards."

"Right you are," said the valiant Tommy, with the air of a Roman sentinel at Pompeii.

Quietly and quickly we descended, and dropped softly on the grass. The sheet disappeared up into the balcony, and we sped across the turf to the scene of the outrage.

"Let's lie low behind this bench," said I, as we reached the edge

of the cricket-ground proper, taking advantage of the shadows as we went, "like savages lurking after their prey," as Elton hoarsely suggested.

We squatted down and reconnoitred. About a dozen or fourteen men were certainly making free with the best pitch. But they were not the cads we had expected to see, as either their garb or their play was enough to show. Most of them were apparently in evening dress, with coats thrown off; one or two in smoking suits. Their features were difficult to recognise, though they seemed familiar. On the whole they seemed to make very little noise, though the sound when bat met ball was distinct enough.

"If they weren't black instead of white, I should have thought they were ghosts," whispered Abbott, who was as easily to be dismayed by a suggestion of the supernatural as impossible to frighten by any other means.

"Ghosts can be black as well as white," I whispered back, "only the black ones are the worst." Abbott shivered. "But I know who they are. It's the O. B.s having a lark, of course."

"They've no right to go cutting our ground up like this," said Abbott, in all the wrath of captaincy. "Let's go for them."

"Come on," said Elton, and we rose to our feet.

A cloud came over the moon, and we made good use of our time, till we reached the spot where the umpire, had there been one, would have stood, hard by short-leg. Here we paused again for a moment, unperceived, as it seemed, and unable to resist a look at the orgie we were about to break up. The game, as will be supposed, progressed in a somewhat peculiar way. Fielding was at a discount; catches were scarcely attempted; indeed, it was a wonder how anyone ever stopped the ball.

In about two minutes the bowler found his way to the stumps at the other end, and a figure we had not before noticed came, bat in hand, to take the vacant place. Unlike the rest, he was in flannels, and he wore a kind of puggaree helmet on his head, "as a protection against the heat of the moon, I suppose," grunted Elton. There was a moment's pause, and the game went on.

"Who is that come in at the other end?" asked Abbott. "I know the look of them all, and I can't make their faces out, even from here."

"I declare," I said, "he looks like old Brenton—only he's got a kind of beard, and his moustache has grown bigger."

"It's Jim!" gasped Abbott, but not as if he had heard me. And as he spoke, the man in the puggaree brandished his bat half angrily, and we caught the words: "I can't catch them properly. There! I've lost the bowling," as he caught the ball on the edge of the bat, and they ran a single.

"It *is* Brenton," said I, looking at him as he stood at our end. "How ghastly he looks in the moonlight with that beard."

"I say," growled Elton, "are you going to stand here all night umpiring? Come for them, if you mean to."

"Half a second," said Abbott; "it's no good going for these fellows; we shall have to be civil to them, I suppose; though it's a horrid shame," as the thought of the outraged pitch came over him again.

I have never been able to think how it was that we were neither seen nor heard as we stood there; nor what restrained us from rushing forward at once to welcome Brenton, whom we had not seen for a year, and had firmly believed to be far away from England at the present time.

The end changed. "Bother!" said Brenton again, as the first ball slipped by. The bowler pitched the next one somewhere about the off-stump, I should say. "Now then," said Brenton to himself, in a low, but perfectly audible voice.

As he spoke he swung round, and pulled it right across towards us. The ball flew straight to Abbott, as he stood between me and Elton. The fieldsmen looked our way, for the first time; Abbott stood ready to catch the ball—a mad attempt by moonlight. As it appeared to reach him he fell straight backwards. At the same moment the players seemed seized by sudden panic; coats were hastily snatched, and in less than half a minute the wickets were deserted, and dark shadows flitting away between the trees at the far side of the ground.

We bent over Abbott, but I still kept my eyes on Brenton, who stood alone, beside the wicket, looking at us. His face seemed to light up with recognition as he moved towards us.

Abbott half raised himself, but as if in pain. "Jim!" he cried. I looked at him, then again at Brenton, who was now close to us. He was very pale, his face clothed with a fortnight's beard, and looking far older than when I had last seen him. His form seemed taller, but very thin and shadowy in his flannels. Mercy on us, do I see the trees and the wickets *through* him? Where is he? Gone!

Every sign of him had vanished. The moon had disappeared behind another cloud, and a chill wind swept over the ground, which seemed suddenly dark and grey. Abbott had fallen back again, and was groaning, apparently quite unconscious. Even Elton, though he did affect to pooh-pooh the matter next morning, looked scared enough at the moment. For myself, I must confess that I never was so frightened, before or since, as I was then, though I hardly knew why, or what about, so confused were my ideas.

However, Elton and I managed to carry Abbott away from the deserted field. Half-way home he came to, and roused himself, just as we had put him down for a moment. "Jove, that came hard," he murmured. "Hallo! what's become of it—where am I? I say, how wet it is." And Elton and I perceived for the first time—we must have been badly frightened—that rain was falling heavily, and

that we were thoroughly wetted. Probably this had helped to recover Abbott, and in a few minutes he was able to walk with help.

We came stealthily underneath the balcony, and whistled softly. The sheets appeared, and slipped down to us. We sent Abbott up first, that we might be able to catch him if he fell. However, he pulled himself together bravely, and got up all safe. We followed, and put him to bed as quietly as we could. Little Thomas heard very little that night about our adventures.

Abbott looked wretched for weeks afterwards, and any mention of ghosts upset him even more than of old. Ill as he seemed, his cricket, especially his wicket-keeping, was better than ever, and he cared for nothing else. Such of the Old Boys as were still about on the day following our adventure told tales of a glorious game they had had by moonlight, until the rain came on and they had to run for it. We thought their manner a trifle suspicious, but their tales agreed well enough, and we could prove nothing against them. Of Brenton, or of any strange batsman in flannels, we could hear nothing. Three or four balls, they said, had been lost, and we could not ascertain that any had been found; of course they might lie in the wood for ages.

One morning, two or three weeks later, Abbott received a letter from a Captain Hawkins, whom we knew slightly from Old Boys' gatherings in former years. It ran thus:

"——shire Regiment, Aden, June 30, 18—.

"My dear Abbott,—It is but a chance that you may remember me; but your old friend, Jim Brenton, was in our regiment, and I am grieved to have to tell you that he died of fever here last Friday morning. I was with him at the last, and he specially charged me to write to you that he had not forgotten you and Stanley. He must have been thinking of you up to the very end, when his mind seemed to be running on old cricket days at school, and I heard him murmur your names just before he died, shortly after three o'clock in the morning. He also bade me forward you a few of his personal possessions as remembrances, which I am making into a packet for the next mail. Though he had been so short a time with us, he had made many friends, and, indeed, no loss has been felt more by the regiment than his.

"Yours very sincerely,

"J. R. Fletcher Hawkins."

"P.S.—The contents of the parcel, when it arrives, are to be divided between you and Stanley."

"Then that was the very night," said I, for once thoroughly awed. "Friday morning, the letter says, and we were out just after twelve on the Thursday night—just three hours before he died. How strange. If it had been the exact time——"

"Yes," said Abbott, shuddering all over. "I heard twelve strike, just as ——" He broke off, as if he *could* not get the words out.

We went off to our work, sadly enough; but it seemed easier to do so than to explain our trouble and beg leave of absence. It was a mathematical school, which the Sixth generally affected to despise, dawdling and chatting unconcernedly through the hour; but to-day we silently opened our books, shocked out of all our boys' swagger.

Hardly had we sat down, when Abbott nudged me violently, and pointed to a sum in the book.

"That's not the page," I whispered in surprise.

"Look, look!" he answered, quite loud, more astonished than ever. I looked, and read:

"If a telegram take five minutes to send, twenty-five minutes to deliver, and an average of four minutes of delay for every hundred miles traversed, how long will an event taking place (a) at Calcutta, (b) at Aden, be known in London before or after it actually happened by clock? the distances being respectively 6,500 and 3,800 miles, and the clock at Calcutta being 5 h. 53 min. before that in London, and that at Aden 3 h. 4 min."

"It *was* the exact time, then!" he said. I thought he would have fainted right away; indeed, he swayed over right against me, and turned quite limp and helpless. Much frightened, I drew the attention of the master to him, and we took him outside, where he presently came to. I mentioned the bad news we had heard, and he was taken to the sick-room at Bromley's. But he would not stay there, but roamed restlessly about for days. Brum was very kind to him, and did all to save him from being harassed that could be done. But it was long before he even partially got over it; and I think he never will completely shake off the effects. Yet his wicket-keeping was something marvellous the rest of that season, better than it has ever been since, I think, though his reputation is of course far greater now, and he will most likely "keep" for the Gentlemen this year. But the faintest reference to apparitions of any kind upsets him frightfully, though it never spoils his cricket nerve. Some fellows got talking on ghosts in the pavilion one match day, and I could not prevent Abbott from overhearing. He played splendidly all the afternoon, with a white, drawn face, and the trembling so strong on him he could scarcely walk across between the overs. It was frightful to see, even for people who didn't know the reason as well as I did. It was no use trying to make him stop playing, for cricket is the breath of life to him. As to his nerve, after trying to stop *that* ball, I should think he would never be frightened by any earthly thing at cricket.

IRENE.

By Lady Gregory.

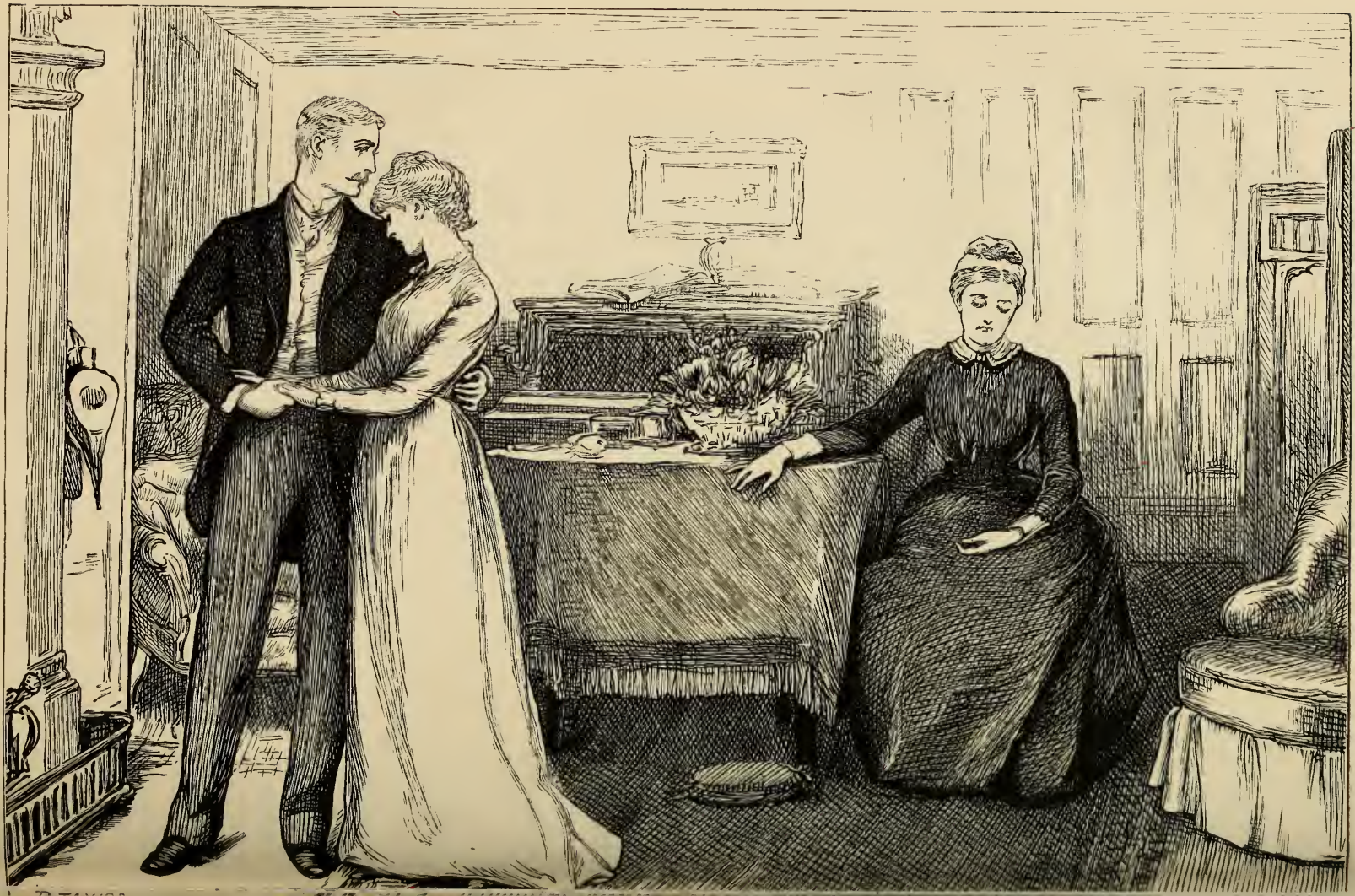
She that I love must know no guile,
Must gracious be in word and ways,
Will send a blessing in her smile,
And give and win an endless praise.
(Irene, you answer not to this—
With mischief at your finger-tips,
With malice lurking in your kiss,
And in your love words, quicks and quips.)

She that I love must learnèd be,
Skilled in all art of head and hands;
Must sound the depths of melody;
Make sweet the speech of many lands.
(But you, Irene, have no such lore—
Your knowledge is a babbling rill;
You gather pebbles on the shore,
According to your vagrant will.)

She that I love, upon the brink,
All innocent must stand, of life;
Of ill and evil know nor think,
Have heard no sound of sin or strife.
(But you, Irene, know all too well
Our tangled heritage of birth;
The line that severs heaven from hell,
The torments and the joys of earth.)

She that I love must be most fair,
Beneath low rippling waves of gold;
The classic features that compare
With the divine Athenian mould.
(Your face, Irene, is out of rule,
Would but the dancing of your eyes
Their flitting flashes leave us cool
To look and calmly criticise.)

Whene'er I find my pictured queen,
Life sure will be serene and sweet;
(But till that day, Irene, Irene,
I lay me at your rebel feet!)



THE ARGOSY.

NOVEMBER, 1890.

THE HOUSE OF HALLIWELL.

BY MRS. HENRY WOOD, AUTHOR OF "EAST LYNNE."

CHAPTER XXIX.

OLD FACES.

THE family at Halliwell House were assembled in the drawing-room one Sunday afternoon in the Christmas holidays. Miss Halliwell was seated in her place at the head of the table, and Mary Goring was opposite to her, in her Aunt Lucy's seat, cutting up oranges for the children, the little Gorings and three or four pupils who were staying the holidays. They used to like to take dessert on a Sunday afternoon in the drawing-room, as it had a pleasant look-out upon the road. Lucy was suffering from one of her acute head-aches, and sat near the fire in the old arm-chair of Mrs. Halliwell. It was very grand now, for the young ladies had worked a handsome covering for it. Mary was nearly eighteen now; a slender, graceful girl, far more beautiful than her ill-fated mother had been.

"There's such a pretty carriage at the gate, auntie," cried little John Goring, who was standing at the window.

"Not at our gate, child," said Hester; for they rarely had visitors on a Sunday. Nevertheless, she turned in her chair, and looked out.

It was certainly at their gate. A low, stylish landau, with glittering silver ornaments on the horses' harness. A lady in purple velvet and furs was in it, and the footman was ringing at the gate. Presently Susan, Dr. Goring's old servant, came up and handed her mistress a card, saying the lady wished to know if she could speak with her.

"Give it to Miss Goring," said Hester, for her glasses were not at hand, and her eyes were growing rather dim for small print without them. "What does it say, Mary?"

"Lady Elliot," answered Mary, reading from the card.

"Who is 'Lady Elliot'?" exclaimed Lucy. "What can she want with us? Some mistake, perhaps."

"She asked for Miss Halliwell," said Susan. "Shall I show her up here, ma'am?"

"Yes, I suppose so," answered Hester. "But—with these cakes and oranges and glasses about—and the children! Show her into the dining-room, Susan."

Hester followed Susan downstairs, and the lady came in. A pale, delicate woman, with hair quite grey, though she did not look past forty.

"You have a young lady at school with you, a Miss Beale," she began, sitting down away from the fire, and removing the sable fur from her neck.

"Oh, yes," answered Hester; "and a dear girl she is. She has been with us five years. But she is not here to-day; she is spending a week with some relatives in Eaton Square. Captain and Mrs. Beale are in India."

"The relatives she is with are friends of mine," returned Lady Elliot; "and I have heard so pleasing an account of your establishment, of the comforts your young ladies enjoy, and the care bestowed on them, that I have been induced to think of placing my daughter with you."

"I am sure we feel much obliged to you," said Hester, in her own simple, courteous way. "If you should decide to entrust us with the young lady, we will do everything in our power for her happiness and welfare."

"She requires peculiar care; more care and attention than others. But for extra trouble I should of course expect to give extra remuneration."

"Is she not in good health?"

"Very good health, robust health; but"—Lady Elliot suddenly stopped, and then went on hurriedly—"the subject is naturally a painful one to me, and when I allude to it I am apt to become agitated."

Hester looked at her in astonishment. Her pale cheeks had turned crimson, her breath was laboured, and her hand, as she played with the fur boa she held, was moving nervously. Hester did not know what to say, so sat silent.

"The fact is her mind is not quite right. Her intellects ——"

"Oh," Hester interrupted, speaking, in the surprise of the moment, quicker than she might have done, "do not pain yourself by saying more. I fear if the poor young lady is like that it would not be possible to receive her here."

"She is not insane," answered Lady Elliot; "you must not think I have mistaken your house for an asylum; but she is *silly*. Some days she is so rational that a stranger would not observe anything to be the matter with her; she will learn her lessons and sew, and practise—for by dint of perseverance we have managed to teach her a little music. Other days she will be childish and silly; but I can assure you there is no madness, no insanity; it is only a weakness of intellect."

"How old is she?"

"She is sixteen. The medical men have recently suggested that were she placed at school with other young ladies, their companionship and example might tend to brighten her intellects. My husband is also of the same opinion. You know him by reputation, I presume."

"No; I am not aware ——"

"Sir Thomas Elliot, of —— Square."

"Sir Thomas Elliot, the great physician!" echoed Hester. "Oh, yes, I know him. Some months ago I took one of our pupils to him three or four times."

"He is my husband," returned Lady Elliot. "This child is our only daughter, and has been a source of great grief to us. When we first discovered her deficiency, as an infant, we believed the affliction to be much worse than it really was; we feared her to be a hopeless idiot; at least I did, for mothers in such a case can only look at the worst side. I thought, when the fatal truth burst upon us, that the shock, the horror, the grief would have killed me. I fear I loved the child too much, with a selfish, inordinate affection: three little daughters before her had died off, one by one, rendering this last more ardently coveted, and, when it came, too fondly cherished. But that hopeless despair—for it was nothing less—has calmed down with years; and though I cannot say I am happy in my child, I am more so than I once thought I ever could be. Let me beg of you to receive her."

The further conversation need not be related, nor the arrangements that were entered into. Hester consented to receive Miss Elliot, upon the understanding that should her peculiarities prove such as to draw the attention of the other pupils from their studies she should at once leave.

The reader cannot have forgotten Tom Elliot, the random infirmary pupil, or Dr. Elliot, the physician. He had remained in Wexborough for some years, after we last saw him there, struggling on; then by the death of Mrs. Turnbull (once Clara Freer) he and his wife were placed in affluent circumstances. Squire Turnbull had died early, and Mrs. Turnbull remained at Turnbull Park with William Elliot. The next to die was lawyer Freer: he left the whole of his money to Mrs. Turnbull unconditionally, and when she died, not many years subsequently, she left her father's property to Dr. and Mrs. Elliot, the greater portion of it to go to William at their death. A small sum she secured absolutely to William, to become his when he came of age. The Elliots had then removed to London, and the tide of luck had set in for Dr. Elliot. How he got the name he could hardly have told himself, but he did get it, and rich patients flocked to him by dozens and by scores. The tide still went on, and one red-letter day Dr. Elliot was bade to kneel down before her Majesty, and rose up Sir Thomas.

Lady Elliot left Halliwell House, and Hester returned upstairs again. She told Lucy and Miss Goring the purport of her visit—at least as much of it as she chose to tell before the children.

"What made Lady Elliot come this afternoon?" asked Lucy.

Hester did not know, for Lady Elliot had offered no explanation or apology. "There are some people who regard Sunday with little more reverence than week-days," Hester observed. "Perhaps Lady Elliot is one of them."

"I know what our nurse used to say—that business transacted on a Sunday would never prosper," interposed Frances Goring. "And Miss Howard, one day when she heard her ——"

"Don't mention Miss Howard's name, Frances," interrupted Mary quickly; "you have been told of that several times."

Frances was apt to be forgetful. Besides, she did not comprehend the full horror which had been brought into the family by Miss Howard.

The second week after the school assembled, Miss Elliot came. Lady Elliot did not bring her, she was ill with a cold, but, to the very great surprise of Hester and Lucy, Miss Graves did—Miss Graves who had formerly lodged with them. They found she was residing with Lady Elliot as companion, or, rather, over-watcher of her daughter. They scarcely knew her, she was looking so stout and well, but she had aged a great deal and had taken to wearing caps. They had been curious to see Miss Elliot, and found her a short, slight girl, with a small, simpering, vacant face, prominent blue eyes and dark hair.

Mary Goring linked Miss Elliot's arm within hers and led her into the school-room. The pupils were just going to tea, and Miss Elliot, without the ceremony of being asked, sat down with them, making herself perfectly at home. Miss Graves took it in the dining-room with Hester and Lucy.

"Mrs. Archer is connected by marriage with Sir Thomas Elliot," she explained, "and that is how I obtained the situation."

Her words did not strike particularly upon Hester's mind at the moment, and Miss Graves went on. "I told Lady Elliot how comfortable Clara would be with you, as soon as I heard she had a notion of placing her here. Which is but recently, I fancy: the plan seems to have been made up all in a hurry."

"What a terrible affliction to have a child like Miss Elliot!" uttered Lucy.

"Terrible I believe it was to Lady Elliot in the first years, by all I can gather," answered Miss Graves. "She was not the rich Lady Elliot then; quite the contrary. Sir Thomas was only Dr. Elliot, an obscure country physician, little known or employed; it is but within these few years that he has come out the great medical star, knighted by the Queen, and run after by every invalid. Many a physician, making his annual thousands, has had to struggle with an early career

of poverty, and Thomas Elliot was one. You have not forgotten my sister's husband, Miss Halliwell, the Reverend George Archer?"

Had Hester forgotten him! A blush rose to her stupid old face—as she was wont to call it; though indeed everyone knew that it was anything but stupid, or old either—and they might have seen it through the ascending steam as she poured out the tea. Perhaps Lucy did. She quietly answered that she had not forgotten him.

"His mother and this Sir Thomas Elliot's father were sister and brother. He was a country clergyman."

Here was another recollection awakened. How often had Hester in those old sunny days heard George speak of his aunt and uncle Elliot. She had little thought in her interviews with the renowned Sir Thomas Elliot, touching the health of one of her pupils, that she was speaking with the cousin of George Archer.

"And Tom Elliot—as Sir Thomas, stiff and stately as he is now, was then called—ran away with a young lady, and married her," proceeded Miss Graves. "Her father never forgave them, and left all his money to his eldest daughter; but she, when she died—she died young—bequeathed it to the Elliots. Since then Dr. Elliot has been a rising man."

"He must be an unusually clever man in his profession," remarked Lucy Halliwell. "Everyone says so."

"Not he," answered Miss Graves; "not a whit more clever than others, only the run of luck is upon him. He has contrived to obtain the name to be just now the fashionable physician of the day, and so crowds flock after him."

"Well, he must be a happy man, at any rate," repeated Lucy, "to see himself so successful after his early struggles."

"Not so fast there," rejoined Miss Graves, significantly; "they neither of them give me the idea of being too happy. Sir Thomas is a gloomy, austere man, who seems to have no enjoyment in life; and no recreation, save that of giving advice to patients. They say he was a wild, rattling young fellow in youth, whom every lady liked; but if so, he is strangely altered. And Lady Elliot looks and moves as if she had a continual load of care upon her. I say to myself sometimes that one might as well be in a convent as with them, for they will both sit in the room for hours and never speak. If it were not for Mr. William, I believe they would as soon be under the earth as above it."

"Who is Mr. William?"

"Their son."

"Their son?" repeated Hester. "I fancied Miss Elliot was an only child."

"Indeed I don't know what they would do if they had only her," replied Miss Graves, who had not lost her loquacity, and seemed to speak of the Elliots' family affairs very freely. "Poor thing! what comfort can they find in one afflicted as she is? Instead of the fond

pride that nature urges one to take in a child, there is rather a feeling of shame substituted, in a case like Clara Elliot's—a wish that, were it possible, we would hide such a child's very existence from the world. These I am sure are Lady Elliot's sentiments, and I fancy they would be mine. Believe me, Sir Thomas and Lady Elliot's hopes and love are confined to their son. They idolise him."

"Is he older or younger than his sister?"

"Several years older. He is nearly four-and-twenty. Ah! and he is worthy of their love. Very handsome, very fascinating, very good and affectionate; it is rare, indeed, one meets with one so deserving of praise as William Elliot."

"Does he follow his father's profession?"

"No. He is studying for the Bar; and, report says, likely to shine in it. Not that there is any necessity for William to work. His aunt, Mrs. Turnbull, left part of the property direct to him, and the rest at his parents' death; and Sir Thomas must be putting by guineas by the thousand. But William is as industrious and anxious to succeed as if he had not a shilling. If I had a son, or brother, like William Elliot, my pride in him would have no limit."

Just then Mary Goring came into the room, and began whispering in her aunt's ear; something about Miss Singleton (who was the head teacher) and bread-and-butter. Hester could not catch what she said.

"Speak up, child," she said. "We need have no secrets from Miss Graves."

Still Mary rather hesitated. "It is not for the bread-and-butter Miss Singleton requested me to inquire," she spoke at length, blushing and looking at Miss Graves. "My aunt always desires that the young ladies may have as much as ever they can eat."

"Cut thin or thick, as they please," interrupted Lucy; "but Miss Graves is no stranger to our arrangements. What is it you are saying, Mary?"

"We only feared Miss Elliot might make herself ill," resumed Mary. "She——"

"What! has she one of her eating fits upon her?" sharply interrupted Miss Graves. "Is she eating a great deal?"

"Fourteen slices since we began to count," replied Mary; "and she took from the thick plate. Miss Singleton thought it would be better to mention it before she let her take any more."

"That's Clara Elliot all over," cried Miss Graves. "These eating fits—as we call them—do come over her now and then. You must limit her at these times to what is sufficient, Miss Halliwell."

"Perhaps she will not be limited," replied Hester.

"Oh, yes, she will. You will find her extremely tractable. Control her with gentle authority, as you would a young child, and she will obey you. It is of no use to reason."

And so they found. And they got on pretty well with Miss

Elliot. The worst days were her laughing ones. She would suddenly burst into a laugh, no one knew at what, and nothing could stop her; shrill, screaming, hearty laughter, one burst upon another, and she throwing herself backwards and forwards on her seat with the exertion. Laughing is contagious, and the first time it came on the whole school caught it, and fell into the roar; some went into hysterics, and others narrowly escaped convulsions. They had never had such a scene; the teachers, even, were affected, and the Miss Halliwells quite driven out of their self-possession. In future, they led her instantly from the school-room, and let her have her laugh out away from the school girls. Another annoying thing was about the pianos. Someone sat by her whilst she practised, generally Mary Goring, to whom she had taken a great fancy; but she would seize a sly opportunity of bringing both her hands down upon the keys, with such force as to break the wires—thump, thump, thump, as one uses a hammer, laughing in delight the whole time. The strength of her hands was astonishing, and they had two pianos damaged in one day. Lucy Halliwell and the teachers declared she used to be worse at the full and change of the moon, but Hester did not see much difference. There was one thing in her favour—that she was perfectly truthful, always telling the straightforward truth fearlessly. No matter whether a fact told against her or for her, out it came without any softening down. It would seem that the dread of displeasure which causes other children to equivocate when endeavouring to conceal a fault was a feeling unknown to Clara Elliot.

On the third day of her residence at Halliwell House, Hester was seated in the drawing-room while Mary Goring took her lesson from the harp-master, when one of the maids announced Mr. William Elliot, and there entered one of the very handsomest young men Hester had ever seen. She did not admire men who are generally called handsome: big, showy, black-curled, prominent-featured, high complexioned, with loud voices, confident manners, and long moustachios. Mr. William Elliot was none of that: tall, he certainly was, and elegant, with features of great beauty, pale and quiet, a sweet look in his hazel eyes, and a pleasant voice and manner that attracted you, whether you would or not. Hester did not know what there was in him to win her heart, but as he held out his hand to her and asked after his sister, it went over to him there and then. Mary continued her playing without notice, for it was the rule of the house that lessons were never interrupted for the entrance of visitors. She had, however, nearly finished.

Clara Elliot came in, giggling and jumping, pulled her brother's face down to kiss, and then flapped herself on the sofa, and began one of those senseless fits of laughing. The harp-master left just then, and Hester was glad of it. Young Mr. Elliot, with a flush on his face, wound his arm about her waist.

"Clara! Clara!" he said, in kind but authoritative tones. "I want to talk to you. Do not laugh just now. Come and look at my new horse."

Her silly laugh subsided instantly. It was evident that her brother had a hold on her affections or her poor mind, and she suffered him to take her to the window. A groom, well mounted, was leading his young master's horse before the house.

"Oh, he is superb!" cried Clara, jumping again as soon as she saw the horse. "When did you buy him, William?"

"Only yesterday."

"Come and look," she uttered, darting across the room, and pulling forward Mary Goring, who was putting the music straight preparatory to leaving the drawing-room; "it's my brother's new horse. Do you know who she is?" she added, as soon as they reached the window—"she is my new sister. Her name's Mary."

He bowed slightly at this unceremonious introduction. Mary would have released herself, but the girl clasped her tightly with her strong hands.

A foolish fancy came over Hester, and perhaps it is foolish to relate it, but that can do neither harm nor good now. As they stood there side by side, William Elliot and Mary Goring, their profiles were turned towards Hester, and she was struck with a singular likeness between the two—the same beautiful cast of features, the drooping eyelid, the arched nostril, and the same sweet look in the mouth. It struck a chill on her heart. She hardly knew whether it was presentiment or whether it was the breeze from the door, but the likeness and the chill were both there. She drove it away and forgot it: though she had too good cause to remember it afterwards: and she unwound Miss Elliot's arms and dismissed Mary.

"I hope Lady Elliot's cold is better," Hester said to her visitor.

"Thank you, yes. She talks of driving down to-morrow. I am glad you are happy, Clara," continued Mr. William Elliot, fondly stroking his sister's hair. "Do you think," he said in a low tone to Hester, as Clara flew off to another part of the room on some flighty errand, "that the change here promises to be of service to her?"

Hester said she could not give an opinion: Clara had been with them too short a time; and presently Mr. Elliot took leave.

As he left the room, Hester turned to ring the bell, and in that moment Clara flung the window wide open, and stretched herself dangerously out of it. Hester's heart was in her mouth—as the saying goes—and she sprang towards Clara, and managed to take the bell-pull with her.

"My dear," she said, "you must not lean out in this way; you might fall and kill yourself. Besides, it is too cold for the window to be opened to-day. Jack Frost is in the roads."

"I like Jack Frost," she answered. "And I never fall out of the window. I hold on."

Hester closed the window, taking Clara's hand in hers, and again came that silly laugh. It was at sight of her brother, who was going out at the gate. He looked up with those handsome eyes of his, and kissed his hand to her. The groom cantered up, and Mr. William Elliot prepared to mount.

She was like a young cat! Before Hester well knew she had drawn away her hand, before she knew she had left her side, she had flown downstairs and was out in the road, dancing round her brother's horse. The horse began dancing too. Clara only clapped her hands and danced the faster.

Susan rushed out to the gate, and Hester rushed down the stairs, and the bell-pull after her, which had somehow hooked itself on to the pocket-hole of her dress. But Mr. William Elliot was off his steed, quietly, but quick as a flash of lightning, had thrown the bridle to the groom, and had his arm round Clara, leading her in again. Hester met them at the hall-door.

"You must not think me wanting in care," she panted to him, the fright having run away with her breath: "I was not prepared for her sudden movements. I shall be so in future."

"Her movements sometimes are sudden," he replied, "but she never comes to harm. There is a providence over her, Miss Halliwell, as there is over a child."

The next day, a very fine one, though cold, Miss Graves came down in the carriage. Lady Elliot's cold was worse, so she had sent her instead to take Clara for an airing. Clara pouted, and would not go. Miss Graves was at a nonplus.

"Lady Elliot will blame me, and say it was my fault," she said. "She made a point of her going out this bright day. Clara, dear, we shall see such fine things as we go along; we shall see Punch and Judy. It is in full work, fife and drum and all, lower down the road."

Punch and Judy was a sight that poor Clara was wild after; there was nothing she enjoyed so much in life. Miss Graves really had passed the show on her way. This was a great temptation to Clara, and she seemed irresolute, but finally shook her head; she wanted to stay with Mary Goring. Miss Graves then suggested that Mary should accompany them and see Punch too, and Clara eagerly seized at it.

"So you had a visit from William Elliot yesterday," observed Miss Graves, when they were gone to get ready. "What young lady was he saw here?"

"He only saw his sister," Hester replied, forgetting as she spoke the temporary stay of Mary in the drawing-room. "And two sad sights she gave me."

"Yes, he did," returned Miss Graves. "One of the young ladies, she told me."

"Oh, true, I remember now. It was my niece. Miss Goring."

"Then he is surely smitten with her," was the rejoinder of Miss Graves. "He kept talking about her to me last night, and said she was the sweetest girl he ever saw."

"Ah, young men are apt to say that of all the pretty girls they meet," was Hester's answer; but somehow she thought of that ugly chill again.

CHAPTER XXX.

CLARA'S ESCAPADE.

EASTER approached, and Clara Elliot went home on the Wednesday in Passion Week to spend some days. On the Thursday she got Mary Goring into her head, and so teased her mother to send for her that Lady Elliot grew quite cross. In most cases Clara was as easily swayed as a child, but when she did get hold of a fixed idea and turn obstinate over it, there was no moving her. At the dinner-table she refused to eat. "I don't want any dinner," she sullenly remarked; "I want Mary Goring."

"Who in the world's Mary Goring?" inquired Sir Thomas.

"Oh, one of her schoolfellows," replied Lady Elliot. "She has been dinning the name into me all day."

"Nonsense," responded Sir Thomas. "You are putting on more childishness than you need, Clara. Eat your dinner."

"She is not nonsense," retorted Clara. "She is better than you are here. William knows it."

A flush, quite uncalled for, rose to Mr. William Elliot's face. "Clara has talked to me about some young lady whom she seems to have taken a fancy to," he explained. "I suppose it is the same."

"You saw her!" burst forth Clara; "you have seen her twice. You know you did."

"Have I?" answered Mr. William.

Lady Elliot interposed, and, to pacify Clara, promised that she should fetch Mary Goring on the morrow. But the morrow was Good Friday. They went to church. After service some visitors came in, and the day passed without fetching Mary Goring, neither had they seen Clara Elliot so obstinately sullen. Alas! the next morning Clara was missing. The house was searched, but she was nowhere to be found. They supposed she must have risen early, dressed herself, and then must have gone out, unseen by Miss Graves and the servants. Her bonnet, velvet mantle, and suite of furs were gone. A strange commotion the house was in. Never had Clara Elliot attempted such an escapade before. Lady Elliot was nearly out of her senses.

"She must have gone after that young girl she was worrying over," cried Sir Thomas, when informed of the disaster. "Mary—what was it? Her schoolfellow."

Nothing more likely. And Mr. William Elliot, the most active of the party, flew downstairs and into a cab.

The Miss Halliwells were seated at breakfast in the dining-room when one of the servants entered and said that Mr. William Elliot had called and wished to see her mistress.

"Mr. William Elliot at this hour!" repeated Hester, rising from her chair. "Can anything unpleasant have happened?"

"You'll never go to him that figure, aunt!" cried Mary Goring in alarm.

Hester considered, and believed that she did look singular. For on this Saturday morning, as many of the pupils had gone home, the maids were going to turn out part of the house, and Hester was going to help them. She had put on a large old-fashioned muslin cap, with a spreading border, to save her head from dust, and a short buff cotton bed-gown—if the modern reader knows what that old-fashioned article means.

"He will think Aunt Hester's showing out in her night-cap and night-dress," said Master Alfred Goring, who had gone to them for a three days' holiday. Matthew, the eldest son, had received an appointment in India, and had not long sailed.

"The gentleman is waiting outside," interposed Ann. "He would not go upstairs."

"Dear me! Outside! Never mind my dress, children. I beg your pardon for keeping you there," said Hester, as he entered. "I had no conception that you had not gone into the drawing-room. The truth is, I was a little averse to appearing before you in this attire, but I am going to be busy with the maids. My nephew suggested that you might think it my night-dress, but I can assure you it is not, though I beg you to excuse it."

"It is I who need excuse for disturbing you at this hour," he answered with a smile, running his eyes over her shoulders and head. And then he told his errand. But they had seen nothing of Miss Elliot, and he hurried away to prosecute the search.

About middle day Lady Elliot arrived, nearly frantic. "A girl like Clara, who wants proper sense to take care of herself!" she uttered. "Suppose she falls into bad hands! Oh, Miss Halliwell, this horrible suspense will kill me."

They could give little consolation to Lady Elliot, and she soon left. In her state of mind she could not remain long in one place. Halliwell House was like a fair that day, and the cleaning got on very badly. Hester soon found she had to leave it to the servants, change her costume, and have a fire lighted in the drawing-room. Mr. Elliot coming, as has been mentioned, in the morning; Alfred running in and out, looking for her up and down the road, and calling in at the police station; then Miss Graves coming; then Lady Elliot; then another flying visit from Mr. William; and in the after-

noon they were honoured by a visit from Sir Thomas. The family that day passed their time running between their own house and Hester's, so certain did they make of the latter's being the point of Clara's journey. Sir Thomas was handsome still, but his manners had grown reserved and his speech chary; widely different from what had been the impudent and attractive Tom Elliot.

"You perceive, madam," he observed to Hester, "we can only arrive at the conclusion that my daughter must have left home to come in search of Miss—Miss—excuse me, I forget the name."

"Miss Goring."

"Miss Goring. I beg your pardon. May I be permitted to see Miss Goring? Though possibly she may not be able to throw any light on my daughter's movements."

What light was Mary likely to throw? thought Hester. However, there could be no objection to Sir Thomas Elliot's seeing her if he wished. So Mary was called.

An expression of surprise arose to Sir Thomas's face when she answered the summons. He had probably only looked to behold a silly schoolgirl, and in walked Mary, with her lady-like manners, her handsome half-mourning dress, and her winning beauty. His manner to Hester had been a little patronising—or she fancied so, but he rose up to Miss Goring the finished gentleman.

"My daughter speaks of you as her friend," he said; "she was doubtless coming in search of you; can you offer any suggestion as to where she may have strayed?"

"No," answered Mary. "Unless," she hesitated, while a damask colour flew to her cheek, for it was not pleasant to speak to a father of his daughter's delinquencies—"unless she should have met the show she is so fond of, and have followed it."

"You allude to Punch. But I think it was too early for the ridiculous exhibition to be abroad," replied Sir Thomas, who was aware of his daughter's predilection for the popular amusement.

"Have you suggested it to the police who are in search?" asked Hester. "If she did happen to see it, she would be certain to stray away in its wake."

"No," he said; "it did not occur to me. But I will lose no time in doing so now. I really thank you very much, madam, for the thought." So Sir Thomas Elliot bowed himself out, and they saw him get into his brougham.

The next arrival was Miss Graves again, just as they were going to tea, which Hester then caused to be carried into the drawing-room. Lady Elliot had sent her.

"This is really dreadful," she exclaimed, taking the cup Hester handed her; "Lady Elliot is quite beside herself with excitement, picturing all sorts of shocking things happening to the child. And she says it's my fault, that I ought to have looked better after her. I am quite exhausted."

"I know what I should do," said Lucy. "I should set the bellman to work."

"There is no bellman in London," laughed Master Alfred—the affair was fun to him. "*I* should engage all the Punch and Judies going, and set 'em up at the street corners. She'd be sure to appear before one of them."

"I do not fear her coming back safe," cried Miss Graves. "Who would harm a poor half-witted child like Clara Elliot?"

Lucy Halliwell looked grave. "How are they to know she is half-witted? And we do hear frightful stories of the wickedness of London."

"Which are all true," eagerly interrupted Alfred. "If they can catch hold of an unprotected female, they cut off her hair and draw her teeth, and the fashionable barbers and dentists give them no end of money for the spoil."

"Be quiet, Alfred."

"It's true, Aunt Lucy. If you don't believe me, you just go into one of the thieves' streets some day, and see how they'd serve you. My! if Miss Elliot has strayed there! won't she come back with a bald head and empty mouth!"

All this was, of course, nothing but nonsense on Alfred's part. He little thought—but it will be better to go on regularly. They were still at tea when Mr. William Elliot came in again; so pale and fagged that Hester was grieved to see him, and said so.

"I own I am disheartened," he replied. "If Clara is not found before night, I tremble for the consequences to my mother. And where to search, or what to do, more than we are already doing, I do not know."

"I say, here's a visit," exclaimed Alfred, who was then at the window. "Does Miss Elliot wear a white petticoat?"

"What do you mean?" Hester sharply said. For she did not like to hear him joking about it in the presence of Mr. Elliot.

"I am not joking, Aunt Hester," was the boy's answer. "It's a visit at your gate. A carriage without sides, laden with human live-stock, and drawn by a Jerusalem pony. What will you bet one of them is not Miss Elliot?"

They all flocked to the window. "Good Heavens above!" exclaimed Miss Graves. It *was* Miss Elliot. But in such a trim! They will never forget the sight.

The vehicle was drawn up before the gate. One of those wide boards on wheels, where you may have seen vegetables and shell-fish hawked for sale. Flat upon it sat a man, who drove the donkey, a woman holding a child, and between them a female figure in a broken straw bonnet, a ragged cotton shawl of no colour but dirt, and a white petticoat. The figure was Clara Elliot; when she came upstairs they recognised her, not before, and William Elliot's lips turned as white as ashes.

What an object the unfortunate girl presented. She was not precisely *en chemise* (as the French governess at Halliwell House was wont reproachfully to cast at the little girls when she would pounce into their chamber at night, and catch them at puss-in-the-corner) but she was not far removed from it. No velvet bonnet and mantle, no furs, no silk dress, and no gloves. No boots, even. Nothing but the disgraceful bonnet and shawl, over the white petticoat, her own stockings and a pair of slipshod slippers, which could have no parallel, unless it was in the Crimea, as mentioned by Ensign Pepper. Clara seemed to enjoy the affair amazingly, and threw herself on a chair with bursts of laughter, hugging the shawl round her. Her hair and teeth were safe.

"Does this here young lady belong to here?" began the man, a tall fellow, all skin and bone, with a deformed foot.

They all answered in a breath that the young lady did belong to them, but Mr. Elliot's voice rose highest, demanding to know where she had been detained, and what brought her home in that state.

"I was away on my rounds, gentlefolks," returned the man, "and knowed nothing on it till I come home this a'ternoon, and found the young miss along of my missis. They can tell you about it better nor I can."

The man pushed his wife forward as he concluded. She had mild blue eyes and a hectic colour. And now that the first shock of their appearance was wearing off, Hester began to like the people. Rough and dark as the man was, common and low as they were in station, she felt sure they were honest and kindly.

"We keep a bit of a shed for coal, ma'am, near to Covent Garden, and for greens and things that my husband can't sell on his rounds," the woman began, addressing herself to Hester, whom she probably took for Clara's mother: "and this morning, about eleven o'clock, as I was coming in from delivering a quarter-of-a-hundred of coals to a customer, somebody lays hold on me and asks if that was the way to Halliwell House, —— Road. So I said, no, it wasn't, nor anywhere near it; and then I noticed what a odd-looking young person it was, and she burst out laughing (perhaps because she saw me a-staring at her), and up and told me she had been robbed of her clothes. Well, I did not pay no attention to her, for we have all sorts of girls in our part, saving your presence, ladies, but she followed me into our shed, and began playing with my children, and asked me to get a cab and take her home. I asked her if she'd got some money, and she said no, they had taken her purse, but her friends would pay. So after that I put some questions to her, and began to believe her tale, especially as I saw that her underclothes, which they had not touched, was fine, like a lady's."

"Who took your clothes from you, Clara?" interposed Mr. William, in the kind but authoritative tone he sometimes used towards her.

"I was coming here to fetch Mary," she answered. "I had walked a good way, and was looking for the turning, but I could not find the right one. Then a woman asked what I wanted, and I told her, and she said she would show me, and took me along with her."

"Well? Go on, Clara," said her brother.

"She took me into a room, up some dirty stairs, where there was another woman. I was angry, and said that was not Halliwell House, and she said we were only going to have some breakfast first. She said that," added Clara, her eyes brightening up, "because I told her I had cheated mamma and all of them, and run away without any. Then she and the other woman took my own things off me, and my pocket, and put these on, and when I cried, they promised I should have them all back again when I got home, and they gave me some bread and bacon."

"What did they do after that?"

"After that, the other woman came out with me, and said she was going to bring me here, but suddenly she was gone, and I could not find her. It was a nasty, dirty street, and I did not know my way, so I asked *her*"—pointing to the woman in the room.

"It is the same tale she told to me, ma'am," resumed the woman to Hester. "There are wretches in this wicked town that do prowl about to pick up children and others who can't defend themselves and rob them of their things. So I believed as the young lady had telled the truth, and I kep' her in our back room, along of my young ones, and wouldn't let her go into the street, as she wanted, for she don't seem to be one as ought to be abroad by herself, and I give her a bit of our dinner, such as it was. And when my husband and big boy came home, I persuaded of him to bring her down here, which he didn't want to, and I come along myself, for, says I, her friends will be more satisfied like, if I goes to testify that she has been kep' safe since she come into my hands. I'm ashamed as I'd nothing to lend her to put on, in place of them dirty things," added the woman, with an increase in her hectic colour, and lowering her tone, "but this have been a hard winter with us, and I have been forced to put away all but what I stands up in."

There was genuine good feeling betrayed in the woman's speech, and William Elliot's eyelashes glistened as he turned to look out into the road. His unfortunate sister! what a display it was for him.

"It warn't as I were unfeeling, or thought of my trouble in bringing the young person down, gentlefolks," gruffly spoke up the husband, "nor it warn't as I knew the animal was done up; but there ain't a busier day throughout the year for us costermongers than Easter Saturday, and I was going out again with a fresh stock, which now I have lost the sale on. Our boy Bill, too, as we've left in charge of the shed and the young ones, can't sell as his mother can."

"You shall be no loser by what you have done, my good man," interposed Mr. Elliot, warmly.

"Well, sir, it were my missis as talked me into it, so I won't say as it weren't. 'Suppose it was our own girl, Bill, as were lost,' says she to me, 'shouldn't we be in a peck o' grief over it, and ain't this one's folks the same, and ain't it our duty to take her home without delaying of it, and let 'em see that no great harm have come to her?' So, with that, I harnessed in the donkey again, for I had took him out for a rest, and folded a sack for the young person to sit upon, and brought her down."

What more he would have said, if anything, was interrupted by Clara Elliot. She sprang to the tea-table, seized upon a slice of bread-and-butter, which was lying there on a plate, and offered it to the woman. "Take it," she said; "you gave me some of your potatoes to-day."

"Not for me, miss," was the answer; "I can do without it. If I might give it to my little boy instead"—looking at Hester—"I should be glad." She had held the boy in her arms the whole time, but with difficulty, for he seemed to be a most restless child, about two years old. "He's always up at the sight of food, ma'am, for he don't get enough of it, and children has such appetites."

William Elliot took the bread-and-butter from Clara, doubled it, and gave it himself to the child. "He shall get enough in future," he whispered to the mother, with one of his kindly looks.

The people went out; William Elliot with them; Alfred followed, and the party upstairs gathered round the window to see them drive away again. The man sat down first, helped up his wife, civilly enough, and they stuck the boy between them on Clara's sack. William Elliot stood by, writing down in his pocket-book the man's address, and Alfred Goring stood at the gate in a frenzy of delight at the scene. Almost at the same moment Lady Elliot drove up in a hired cab: her own horses were tired.

She came upstairs, and was painfully agitated when she heard the details, although thankful to receive Clara safe and sound. The girl's half-clad, ludicrous appearance, the wretched substitute for her own clothes, the description of her conveyance home, the nondescript vehicle on which she sat in state, on the coal-sack, behind the donkey, the rough costermonger and his half-starved wife, and, worst of all, the girl's utter indifference to the shame! Indifference! she *enjoyed* the remembrance of the novel ride. All this was as wormwood to Lady Elliot.

Clara turned restive about going home and said she would stop where she was, with Mary Goring. It was thought advisable to give in to her, at any rate for a day or two: and she went dancing upstairs to have her clothes changed, the desirable articles she had been rejoicing over being immediately consigned to the dust-bin.

"Oh, William, what a disgrace!" murmured Lady Elliot to her son, as the red flush came into her pale cheeks, the light into her glistening eye; "better I had no daughter, you no sister, than to

have her thus; better that it would please God to remove her from us!"

Little less agitated was he as he bent before his mother, little less flushed his own face, but it was with pain at hearing such words from her. "Dear mother," he whispered, as he took her hands, "look not upon it in this spirit. Rather be thankful that the affliction is so much lighter than it might be—and especially thankful this day, as I am, that she is restored to us unharmed."

She strained his hands in hers, before parting with them, and gazed tenderly into his handsome face, feeling thankful for the blessing bestowed upon her in *him*. And, indeed, she had cause: for there are few sons in these degenerate days like William Elliot.

CHAPTER XXXI.

SIR THOMAS AND LADY ELLIOT.

So that warning chill, as Hester Halliwell called it, had worked itself out, and the tribulation had come. *Was* it her fault? She asked herself the question every hour of her life. Perhaps when Lady Elliot invited Mary to spend some time in her luxurious home, Hester ought to have refused. But Lady Elliot pressed for her, saying what a comfort she would be to their unfortunate daughter, and Hester was laughed at for hinting at an objection. Lucy laughed at her; Miss Graves laughed at her; Frances Goring, though she was little more than a child, laughed at her; and when they inquired her grounds, she had none to give, for not even to herself did she, or could she, define them. "They live in style, they keep gay company, servants, carriages; it will be giving Mary ideas beyond her sphere of life," were all the arguments Hester could urge; none difficult to over-rule. So Mary went for a few days at Easter, which would have been nothing, for she came back perfectly heart-whole; but she went again at Midsummer to accompany Lady Elliot and Clara to the sea-side, and then the mischief was done. What else could have been expected, thrown, as she was, into the fascinating society of William Elliot?

But who was to know that he would make one of the party? No one. In the first week of Lady Elliot's arrival at Spa (as good a name as any other for their marine residence, as it is not convenient to give the right one) she was surprised at being followed thither by her son. He had come for some sea-bathing, he said, and forthwith engaged apartments at an hotel. Nine weeks Lady Elliot remained, and the whole of that time he and Mary Goring were thrown together. Sir Thomas Elliot wrote once, a curt, decisive letter of three lines, demanding how much more time he meant to waste, and Mr William wrote back that he was studying where he was just as hard as he

could in his chambers. So he was: studying the sweet face and pure mind of Mary Goring. Had Sir Thomas suspected that, his letter might have been more decisive.

"I guessed how it was," Miss Graves said afterwards to Hester. "There were climbings up the cliffs, and ramblings on the beach after sea shells, and readings in the afternoon, and moonlight lingerings in the garden in the evening: Mr. William could not quite deceive me. I was left to take care of Clara Elliot, while he talked sentiment with Miss Goring."

"Strolling on the beach together, and talking sentiment by moonlight!" uttered Hester in dismay. "And you could see all this going on and never write to me!"

"It's the moonlight does it all," peevishly retorted Miss Graves; "sentimental strolls would come to nothing without it. The moon puts more nonsense into young heads than all the novels that ever were penned. I'll give you an example. One night they were all out in the garden, Mr. William, Clara, and Miss Goring. A long, narrow strip of ground it was at the back of the house, stretching down nearly to the sea. Tea came in, and Lady Elliot called to them from the window, but no one answered, so I had to hunt them up. I tied my handkerchief over my head, for I had a touch of the toothache, and away I went. It was an intensely hot night, with the moon as bright as silver; and I looked here, and I looked there, till I got to the end of the garden. On the bench there, fast asleep, with her head resting on the hard rock behind her, was Clara, and close by stood William Elliot, with his arm round Mary, both of them gazing at the moon. Now, I ask you, Miss Halliwell, or any other impartial person, whether such a scene could have been presented to me in broad daylight? People are reserved enough then, and take care to stand at a respectful distance. The moon is alone to blame, and I'll maintain it."

She vexed Hester uncommonly with her rubbish about the moon. As if, thought Hester, when she saw them growing fond of each other, she could not have despatched a hint of it by the post. "What could Lady Elliot have been thinking of?" she asked aloud.

"Bless you, *she* saw nothing of it," returned Miss Graves. "Her idea was that William haunted us for the sake of taking care of Clara, and she was rarely out with us herself. She makes so much of Mr. William: it would never enter her imagination that he could fall in love with anything less than a lord's daughter. She would see no more danger in Mary Goring than in me. But there's no great harm done, Miss Halliwell. When I was Mary Goring's age I had lots of attachments, one after the other, and they never came to anything. A dozen at least."

Hester thought it very stupid, comparing herself with Mary Goring. Not that she wished to underrate Miss Graves, who was estimable in her way, but she and Mary were so differently constituted.

Miss Graves full of practical sobriety, without a grain of romance in her composition, all head; while Mary was made up of imaginative sentiment and refined feeling, all heart. The one *would* be likely to have a dozen "attachments" and forget them as soon as they were over; but the other, if she once loved, would retain the traces for all her future life. It was of no use, however, saying so to Miss Graves, she would not have understood it, and Hester was too vexed to argue. Besides, it would not undo what had been done.

Hester had seen it as soon as Mary returned from Spa. There was a change about the girl; a serene look of inward happiness, an absence of mind to what was going on around her, a giving way to dreamy listlessness of thought. And when, in the course of conversation, it came out that William Elliot had made one of the party at Spa, her aunt's surprised exclamation caused the flush in Mary's cheeks to deepen into glowing, conscious crimson. In one of her letters Mary had mentioned William's name, but Hester never supposed he was there for more than a day or two—had taken a run down to see his mother and sister. That suspicious crimson convinced her at once. She wished it anywhere but in Mary's face; and when Miss Graves went to Halliwell House a few days subsequently to spend an evening, Hester spoke to her. Hence the above conversation.

"You need not annoy yourselves over it," persisted Miss Graves, who was anxious to excuse herself. "If they did fall in love with each other—which I daresay they did, and I won't tell any story about it—they will soon forget it, now they don't meet. If you keep her out of sight when Mr. William calls here, he will soon cease coming, and the affair will die a natural death."

"Of course Mary will not be permitted to see him," rejoined Hester, warmly: "but as to the affair dying out, that's another thing."

The crosses that good resolutions meet with: the ruses young people are up to, unsuspected by old ones! While Hester and Miss Graves were cleverly laying down plans for the separation of the two parties in question, they were actually together in the dining-room below. Upon Hester's descending to that apartment some time afterwards, there she came upon them. They were standing at the open window, enjoying each other's society in the dangerous twilight hour of that summer's night; in the sweet scent of the closing flowers; in the calm rays of the early stars—all dangerous together for two young hearts. The saying of "knocking one down with a feather" could not precisely apply to Hester, for you might have knocked her down with half a one.

"Well, I'm sure!" uttered Hester, not in her usual tone of polite courtesy. "I did not know *you* were here, sir. Have you been here long?"

"Not long," replied William Elliot, advancing to shake hands.

Not long! It came into Hester's mind as she spoke that she had heard the knock of a visitor a full hour before.

She had not seen him for three months, and his good looks, his winning manners, struck upon her more forcibly than ever. Not so pleasantly as they used to do, for the annoying reflection suggested itself—If they won over to him her old heart, what must they have done by Mary's? Hester took her resolution: it was to speak openly to him: and she sent Mary upstairs to Lucy and Miss Graves.

"Mr. Elliot," she began in heat, "was this well done?"

He looked fearlessly at her, with his truthful eye and open countenance. "Is what well done?" he rejoined.

"I am deeply grieved at having suffered my niece to accompany your mother to the sea-side," continued Hester. "Had I known you were to be of the party, she should certainly not have gone."

"Why not, Miss Halliwell?"

"Why not! I hear of ramblings on the sands, and moonlight interviews in the garden—you with Mary Goring. Was this well done, sir?"

"It was not ill done," was his reply.

"Mr. Elliot," Hester went on, "I am a plain-speaking old body, but I have had some experience in life, and I find that plain-speaking answers best in the end. You must be aware that such conduct as you have pursued cannot well fail to gain the affections of an inexperienced girl: and my belief is that you have been wilfully setting yourself out to win those of Miss Goring."

"I will not deny it: I have tried to win them. Because, dear Miss Halliwell," he added, speaking with emotion, "because she first gained mine. I love Miss Goring truly, fervently, with a love that will end but with my life. From the first day I saw her here, when poor Clara said she had found a new sister—you may remember it—she never ceased to haunt me; her face, and its sweet expression, her manners, her gentle voice, were in my mind continually, and I knew they could only belong to a good, pure, and refined nature. It did not take long companionship, when we were thrown together, to perfect that love; and, that done, I did set myself out, as you observe, to win hers, in exchange. I trust I have succeeded."

Had Hester raced up to the top of the monument, where she had never yet ventured, the run could not more effectually have taken away her breath than did this bold avowal, which, to her ears, sounded as much like rhapsody as reason. "And what, in the name of wonder, do you promise yourself by all this, sir?" she asked, when her amazement could find speech. "What end?"

"There is but one end that such an avowal could have in view, Miss Halliwell," he replied. "The end, the hope that Miss Goring will become my wife."

"Well, you will excuse me, Mr. Elliot," said Hester, after a long stare at him, "but I fear you must be crazed."

He burst into laughter. "Why do you fear that?"

"There is no more probability of your marrying Mary Goring than

here is of your marrying that chair, sir. So the best thing you can do is to get her out of your head as speedily as you can."

He did not speak for some moments, and the colour mounted to his brow. "What is your objection to me, Miss Halliwell?"

"I suppose you are playing on my simplicity to ask what my objection is," returned Hester. "It is your family that the objection will come from, not mine. The son of the rich and great Sir Thomas Elliot will never be suffered to wed simple Mary Goring."

"Miss Goring is of gentle blood," he remonstrated.

"I trust she is," said Hester, drawing herself up; "though we, the sisters of her mother, are obliged to keep a school for our living. But your friends will look at position as well as gentle blood. May I ask if Sir Thomas and Lady Elliot know of this?"

"Not yet."

"As I thought, Mr. Elliot. Your romance with my niece must end this night."

"It will not, indeed, Miss Halliwell."

"Sir, it shall. And I must observe that you have acted a cruel part. A young lady's affections are not to be played with like a foot-ball. However, you have seen her for the last time."

"Allow me to see her once more," he rejoined.

"Not if I know it, sir."

"But for one instant, in your presence," he pleaded. "Surely that can do no harm, if we are to part."

Something came into Hester's brain just then about George Archer—a vision of her last interview with him in Lord Seaford's park. "Why should she deny these two a final adieu?" she asked herself. So she relented, and called Mary down—and Hester reproached herself afterwards with being exceedingly soft for her pains.

Mary shrank to Hester's side when she came in, but William Elliot drew her away. "I have been avowing to your aunt how matters stand," he said. "She would persuade me to relinquish you: she thinks such love as ours can be thrown off at will. So I requested your presence here, Mary, that we might assure her our engagement is of a different nature, that we are bound to each other by ties irrevocable in the spirit as they shall hereafter be made so in reality."

So that was all Hester got for calling Mary. She had paled, and flushed, and faltered, and now she began to cry and tremble, and William Elliot leaned over her and reassured her with words of the deepest tenderness. Hester saw nothing but perplexity before them, and not one wink of sleep did she get that night.

One day the renowned physician, Sir Thomas Elliot, was not himself. In lieu of the stately imperturbability which characterised the distinguished West-end practitioner, his manners betrayed a nervousness, an absence of mind, never before witnessed in him. To one lady patient, who consulted him for dyspepsia, he ordered cod-liver-

oil and port-wine; to another, far gone in a consumption, he prescribed leeches, and to live upon barley-water. He had a large influx of patients that day, and an unusual number of calls to make from home. Not until the dinner-hour did he find his time his own.

He went straight to his wife's room, and sat down upon a low ottoman which stood in its centre. Lady Elliot glanced round at him, somewhat surprised, for it was not often her liege knight favoured her with his presence there in the day. She continued dressing without comment. Sir Thomas and Lady Elliot rarely wasted superfluous words one upon the other.

"Can't you finish for yourself and send her away?" cried Sir Thomas, indicating the attendant by a movement of the head.

More surprised still, but not curious (for Lady Elliot, young and handsome as she was yet, really gave one the idea of possessing no interest in what pertained to this present life—or in the one to follow it, for the matter of that), she dismissed the maid, but did not withdraw herself or her eyes from the glass, as she continued her toilette.

"I did not think, Louisa, you could have been such a fool," was the complimentary opening of Sir Thomas Elliot, in low tones of intense indignation.

Lady Elliot looked at him—as well she might—and a flush rose to her face. She paused, however, before she spoke, coldly and resentfully.

"I proved myself that, years ago."

Sir Thomas knew well to what she alluded: to her own hasty and unsanctioned union with himself: and a peevish "tush" broke from his lips.

"You have proved yourself a greater one now, Louisa, and you must pardon my plainness in saying so. If you and I rushed into a headlong marriage it ought to have been the more reason for your not leading William into one."

"William!" echoed Lady Elliot, in a startled voice. It was, perhaps, the only subject that could arouse her. She idolised her son.

"You have got into this habit of taking your own course, without consulting or referring to me; going here, going there—doing this, doing that," proceeded Sir Thomas. "When you went to Spa for an eternal number of weeks, had you informed me that it was your intention to have William and Miss Goring there also, and make them companions to each other, I should have put a stop to it. Anyone but you might have seen the result."

"Result?" faltered Lady Elliot, with a sickening foreshadowing of what was coming.

"Of course," angrily repeated Sir Thomas. "When a young fellow like William is thrown for weeks into the society of a girl, lovely and fascinating as—as—the deuce"—Sir Thomas at the

moment could not think of any more appropriate simile—"only one result can be looked for. And it has turned up in his case."

"You mean ——"

"That he is over head and ears in love with her; and has been to me this morning to ask my sanction to their marriage. I wish you joy of your daughter-in-law, Lady Elliot."

Lady Elliot scarcely suppressed a scream. "It is impossible, it is impossible," she reiterated in agitation. "I never thought of this."

"Then you must have lived at Spa with your eyes shut. But I can hardly believe you. To think that you and Eliza Graves could be moping and meandering all those weeks and not see what was going on under your very noses! Women are the greatest ——"

What, Sir Thomas did not say, for he dropped his voice before bringing the sentence to a conclusion. "I thought William was at Spa an unaccountable time, and wrote him word so," he continued, "but I never imagined you had that Miss Goring there."

"You must have known it," returned Lady Elliot.

"How should I? I saw she was staying here the day or two before you went, but I thought—if I thought at all about it—that, as a matter of course, she returned home. I say you are always acting for yourself, Lady Elliot, without reference to my feelings—if I have any, which, perhaps, you don't believe. When, the morning of the day fixed for your departure, I was summoned in haste out of town, you might have delayed it until the following one. Most wives would. But no, not you! I came back at night, and found you gone. How was I to know that you took Miss Goring with you?"

"It is too preposterous ever really to come to anything," observed Lady Elliot, anxious to find comfort in the opinion. "William, with his personal beauty, his talents, and his prospects, might marry into a duke's family if he chose."

"Exactly. But he chooses to marry into that of a schoolmistress."

"He must not 'choose,'" persisted Lady Elliot, growing excited; "he must be brought to reason."

"Brought to what?" asked the knight.

"Reason."

"I don't know," was the significant reply. "'Reason' did not avail in a similar case with you or with me. William may prove a chip of the old block."

"It never can be permitted," said Lady Elliot vehemently. "Marry Mary Goring! It would be disgracing him for life. William would never prove so ungrateful."

"Leaving your ladyship the agreeable reflection that you were the chief bringer-about of the disgrace. Looking at the affair dispassionately, I do not see how it is to be prevented. William possesses money, independently of us. Enough to live upon."

"Enough to starve upon," scornfully interrupted Lady Elliot.

"Twice, nearly thrice, as much as we enjoyed for many years of

our early lives," rejoined Sir Thomas in a subdued voice. "And to them, who are just now spoony with fantastic visions, 'Love in a cottage' may wear the appearance of love in a paradise."

"Can nothing be done—can *nothing* stop it?" reiterated Lady Elliot.

"One thing may. I should have put it in force this morning, but that I certainly thought you must be a party to this scheme, after what William let out of the goings-on at Spa."

"And that thing?" she eagerly asked.

"To forbid it, on pain of my curse. As I believe our parents very nearly did by us. I do not think William would brave it."

Lady Elliot pressed her hands over her eyes, as if she would shut out recollection of the years which had followed her rebellious marriage. The retrospect was one of dire anguish; far worse, in all probability, than had been the reality. Her husband turned to leave the room. She sprang after him, and drew him back.

"Oh, Thomas! anything but that. Never curse our boy, whatever betide. Think of the misery our disobedience entailed on us. Do not force *him* into it."

"Then you will let him marry the girl?"

"Yes. If the only alternative must be our fate over again for him."

"He comes to-night for the answer," continued Sir Thomas, standing with the door in his hand. "What is it to be? Consent? I leave the decision to you, for I will not, in this matter, subject myself to after-reproaches."

"Consent," she replied. But Lady Elliot wrung her hands in anger as she said it. She had anticipated so much more brilliant an alliance for her son.

CHAPTER XXXII.

A CONSULTATION.

So sunshine came into Halliwell House, for William Elliot went there and laid his proposals for Mary in due form before the Miss Halliwells. They could not believe their own ears. He frankly stated that Sir Thomas and Lady Elliot were not cordially inclined to the match, for they had looked to his choosing rank and wealth; but they had not withheld their consent, and he was certain Mary would soon win her way to their entire love. Perhaps this was as much as Mary Goring could have hoped for; indeed more, for in point of worldly greatness William Elliot *was* above her. Hester suggested that they should not marry till the "entire love" of Sir Thomas and his wife had been gained, but Mr. Elliot laughed at her, and of course Mary thought with him. They were both in a maze of enchantment, and common-sense, as Hester understood the word, was out of the

question. Preparations were begun for the marriage, and for a few weeks the house was the pleasantest of the pleasant.

"I told you it would turn out well," triumphantly exclaimed Miss Graves one day when she came down to see Clara Elliot.

"But you told us it would turn out well by coming to nothing," laughed Lucy. "You have been away a whole month, Miss Graves; where have you been? Clara said to Birmingham, but the information she picks up is not always to be depended on, and William did not seem to know."

"I went to Birmingham first, then to Cheltenham, and then back to Birmingham again. You will never guess what for, unless you have heard. Lady Elliot knew."

"We have heard nothing. Lady Elliot does not come here; when she wants to see Clara she sends for her."

"That's to show her pique at William's choice," cried Miss Graves. "I went away for my sister's wedding."

"Your sister: Mrs. Archer?"

"Yes. It is an excellent thing for her. She was lady-housekeeper, you know, at old Hazzelrigg, the button maker's; and one morning, quite unexpectedly, he asked her to marry him. She did not know whether to say yes or no, and she sent for me down to Birmingham. I found he was a martyr to illness, and wanted a wife to nurse him. 'Oh, marry him,' said I to her; 'he's only a poor old cripple, without much use in his legs; but you'll get a good home, and be mistress of it instead of manager.' So she told him she would, and we two went to Cheltenham and took lodgings there, for she didn't care exactly to have the wedding in Birmingham, in the face of all his married daughters and their families. They went to the house, I believe, and gave it him well, when they found what he was going to do, but he would not give in to them, and at the proper time he had an invalid carriage and was brought to Cheltenham, and they were married. Afterwards he told her how his daughters had gone on at him, and she said if she had known that she would not have had him. We returned to Birmingham at once, and I stayed a few days with them before coming back. That's the history; and instead of being Mrs. Archer she's Mrs. Hazzelrigg."

"I wish her joy," said Lucy, heartily. Hester was thinking of her former husband.

"Joy!" echoed Miss Graves, "that's an empty compliment in her case. But he is said to be worth a hundred thousand pounds. It is, however, chiefly settled on his family, and my sister would not wish it otherwise. But now, about your wedding here. Lady Elliot will not speak of it, and I could get at nothing. It is to be pretty soon, I find. Where are they to live?"

"Mr. Elliot has taken a pretty house at Regent's Park," said Hester.

"Bad locality," cried Miss Graves. "Always damp. What sort of style do they mean to set up in?"

"A sufficiently sumptuous one, I call it," answered Hester; "though he thinks it over moderate. I advised them to begin in a small way, more in accordance with his own than his father's income, and he listened to me. Two maids and a man they will keep; no carriage; only William's horse."

"He will be rich when Sir Thomas dies," remarked Miss Graves.

"But he and Lady Elliot may live many years."

"I suppose Mary is busy getting her things ready."

"Busy all day long," said Lucy. "Except when William is here: and that's every evening. The half-past five omnibus is sure to bring him."

"Half-past five!" echoed Miss Graves. "What time does he dine, then?"

"In the middle of the day, I believe. He has discovered that dining early is good for his constitution, and never feels well, he says, without an early tea. So that he takes with us. We have it up here in the drawing-room every evening, visitor fashion."

"That's his depth," said Miss Graves. "Good for his constitution! Does Mary see through it?"

"We do," laughed Lucy. "Sometimes he gets Hester to give Mary a lesson in housekeeping, and he sits listening to it with the most serious face imaginable; but you should catch a glimpse of his handsome eye, dancing with merriment. About legs of mutton and apple tarts, he will say, and that sends Frances Goring off into fits of laughter, almost as bad as poor Clara Elliot's. But I must say, in one respect Hester is cruel to him."

"How?"

"She is so tantalising. She professes to allow them courting interviews—makes a boast of it, indeed—but before they have had time to say a word to each other, in she goes, and breaks it up. Very exasperating it must be to Mr. William."

"I limit their interviews to three minutes," explained Hester, "and look at my watch that they may not exceed it. My dear mother brought me up in these punctilious manners, and I approve of them."

"What a shame!" cried Miss Graves. "I should take her out for a walk, were I William Elliot, and talk to her then."

"He did try once," said Lucy. "He asked Hester to let Mary go, but she offered herself instead, and he has never asked since. I do think it is too bad, but Hester is the manager, so I can't interfere."

"I think it's a great deal too bad," repeated Miss Graves. "Why, they get no courting at all. It is a contrast to Spa, I can tell you."

"They had too much of it," said Hester. "Mary is occasionally invited, with Clara, to spend the day at Lady Elliot's, and——"

"Is she cordial with Mary again," interrupted Miss Graves.

"She has had her there lately. I expect at first she made a merit of necessity, but she grows more cordial with every visit, and is almost

as fond of her as she used to be before she knew of William's preference."

"That is pleasant," said Miss Graves. "What were you going to say?"

"Why—the carriage brings them home at night," remarked Hester, "Mary and Clara, escorted by Mr. William; and a nice time those two must have of it, for Clara is safe to go to sleep the instant they get in, and never wake till they get out. Plenty of time for talking secrets then, I hope."

"That's capital!" exclaimed Miss Graves, clapping her hands. "It makes up for your barbarity, Miss Halliwell."

"You may call it capital," returned Hester, "but it is against my old-fashioned notions of propriety. I hinted so to Mr. William. How he laughed! I laughed too, and could not help it, when he told me I was a good old dragon of a guardian. Then he changed to seriousness, as he took my hand in his, that sweet, earnest expression rising to his face, and whispered that I could not wish to protect Mary more faithfully than he would do, for that she was dearer to him than ever she was to me. Altogether, things go on very nicely," concluded Hester, "and we are very happy."

They were happy. But an end came to it: as it comes for the most part to all things that are joyful and bright in life. And then Hester asked herself how she could ever have been deluded into the belief that the son of Sir Thomas and Lady Elliot would really espouse Mary Goring.

A telegraphic summons came early one morning to the popular physician, Sir Thomas Elliot. He was wanted in all haste at Middlebury. Sir Thomas hastened to the Paddington station, caught the express train, and was with his patient, a lady, in the afternoon. Her medical attendant was Dr. Ashe; and a Mr. Warburton was also called in. When in conversation, the discourse of the medical men led to matters foreign to their patient—no very rare occurrence in medical consultations.

"I should like to know what her previous constitution has been," remarked Sir Thomas to Dr. Ashe, speaking in reference to the patient. "I presume you have been her usual medical attendant."

"No, I have not," replied Dr. Ashe—who was only called "Dr." according to the Middlebury fashion; "this is the first time I have attended her. Dr. Goring used to be the family attendant. But she must have enjoyed pretty good health, for he has been dead—let me see—more than two years, and no one has been called in to her since."

Dr. Goring! Sir Thomas Elliot pricked up his ears, and a flash of intelligence darted into his mind. She, who was soon to be his son's wife, was a native of Middlebury, and the daughter of a medical man. This Dr. Goring, then, must have been her father. He would ask a few particulars.

"What sort of a man was Dr. Goring?" he suddenly said. "Respectable? Popular?"

"Very much so," was the reply of Dr. Ashe.

"Until that nasty business occurred about his wife," broke in Mr. Warburton. "He lost both respect and popularity then."

"What business was that?" inquired Sir Thomas.

"She was recovering from an illness—one of the nicest little women you ever saw—in fact, all but well," observed Dr. Ashe. "I had seen her in the morning—for I attended her with all her children—and told her that the next day she might move into the drawing-room. That was about eleven o'clock. By five in the afternoon she was dead."

"What from?" inquired the physician.

"Poison, Sir Thomas."

"Poison!" echoed Sir Thomas Elliot.

"Strychnia."

"By whom administered?"

"There was the question," said Dr. Ashe. "It never has been cleared up from that day to this. With some people, poor Goring got the credit of it; but I believe the man to have been as innocent as I was. Nay, I am sure of it."

Sir Thomas Elliot rose from his chair in a perturbed manner. His son about to marry the daughter of a man suspected of ——! He sat down again.

"The case was published in the *Lancet*," resumed Dr. Ashe. "Of course without casting any conjectures as to who had administered it."

"I remember now—I remember reading it," cried Sir Thomas. "But it never struck me that—What were the grounds for suspecting the husband?"

"In my opinion, I say, there were no grounds," repeated Dr. Ashe. "A few only may have thought so, in just the first blush of the affair. I never saw a more affectionate husband than Goring was; and he had nothing to gain by her death. Everything to lose."

"The insurance money," suggested Mr. Warburton.

"Nonsense! I know some cast it in his teeth: very unjustly, if they had only considered the facts. Mrs. Goring had a clear income of three hundred a year, an annuity which died with her. Did not go to her husband or children, understand, Sir Thomas; absolutely died with her. She had insured her own life some years before for three thousand pounds for the benefit of her children. But what is a sum of three thousand pounds in comparison with three hundred a year? And Goring did not touch the money; he invested it for the children. He was a maligned man."

"Was he accused of the crime?" asked Sir Thomas.

"Oh, no, no; nothing of that sort. At his wife's interment—I never saw such a crowd in the churchyard before—some voices hissed him.

'Murderer!' 'Poisoner!' that was the extent. But if ever grief was genuine in this world, it was Goring's for the loss of his wife. They were on the wrong scent," muttered Dr. Ashe in a lower tone.

"Dr. Goring, unfortunately, did not show out quite clear upon another point," interrupted Mr. Warburton. "There was a governess residing with them, a Miss Howard, and he was too attentive to her: but Goring was a free man at all times in his manners with women. Some said it was her fault; that she laid herself out to attract him; and, altogether, the affair had given pain and annoyance to Mrs. Goring. So Miss Howard received warning to leave, and the little Gorings were to be sent to school. Before the change was made, Mrs. Goring was poisoned!"

"Was this governess suspected?" inquired Sir Thomas Elliot.

"I don't know what other people may have done," interposed Dr. Ashe, warmly. "I had my opinion upon the point, and always shall have. But it does not do to speak out one's opinions too freely. There was no proof."

"Where was the strychnia procured?"

"From Goring's own surgery. At least, such was the conclusion drawn, for he kept some there. Though whether the bottle had been touched or not he could not himself tell. Mrs. Goring had dined, and was asleep on her bed, the nurse having gone to her dinner. During her absence, the poison was introduced into a glass of water, which, as was customary, stood at the bedside, and Mrs. Goring, when she awoke, drank of it. Goring was in the garden the whole of this time, never came into the house at all, as the servants testified, until aroused by the screams in Mrs. Goring's room. Miss Howard was in the dining-room, which adjoined the surgery, and the servants equally testified that if she had quitted it to go upstairs, they must have heard her. So the case was wrapped in mystery, and remains so."

"The worst feature was Dr. Goring's marrying the woman afterwards," observed Mr. Warburton.

"Marrying *her!* the governess!" exclaimed Sir Thomas Elliot.

"He did. She was dismissed from the house on Mrs. Goring's death; but twelve months afterwards, Miss Howard became Mrs. Goring."

"Why, the man must have been mad!" uttered Sir Thomas.

"He was wrong there," said Dr. Ashe. "I told him so. But what I said went for nothing, for he was bent on it. His death was a mystery also: I could never fathom it. He married this girl, Sir Thomas, went off with her for a fortnight, and came back, so changed that we hardly knew him. He started on the journey a gay, healthy man; he returned wasted in frame, broken in spirits, and in two months was laid in his first wife's grave. There was no particular complaint, but he wasted away to death; literally *pined* away it seemed."

"And pined in silence," added Mr. Warburton, "for he never would acknowledge himself ill."

"I see, gentlemen," returned Sir Thomas, "it was a bad affair altogether, from beginning to end; one not too well calculated to bear the light of day."

"At any rate, the light of day has never been thrown upon it," answered Dr. Ashe.

"And the daughter of such a man shall never become William's wife," mentally concluded Sir Thomas Elliot. "But, to go back to the next room, gentlemen," he added aloud. "My opinion——"

We need not follow their consultation for their patient. It came to an end, and Sir Thomas Elliot went steaming up to town again by the first train.

(To be concluded.)

THE SAILOR'S DREAM.

A SAILOR on a lonely shore
Dreams of the happy days to come,
When some brave ship shall bear him home,
Ah! home again once more!

He dreams of walking once again
Up the still village street until
He leans upon a window-sill,
Looks through a window-pane.

He sees his dear ones sitting round
His blazing hearth, and hears them say,
"Oh, weary-long is every day
Until our dear one's found!"

He dreams, until his eyes grow dim,
Of all the gladness that might be,
If that brave ship should cross the sea
Which will not come for him.

Better his lonely life—made fair
With dreams of hope, undying, sweet—
Than if he journeyed home to meet
An infinite despair!

For loving wife and children three
Are laid beneath the daisied grass;
And all he dreams is as it was;
Never again can be!

E. NESBIT.

CARMEN SYLVA.

IN the year 1843 there was joy in the palace home of the Prince of Wied and his consort, the Duchess of Nassau, over the birth of a little daughter. They bore her soon to the baptismal font, and there, in prince-like fashion, they gave her three names, Elizabeth Pauline Ottilia, little dreaming that she would one day choose for herself a name that would cause all these names which they bestowed upon her to be forgotten.

The Prince of Wied was a man of much intellect, and still greater culture; moreover, he was a man who held enlightened and advanced opinions; especially was his creed very broad and bright on the subject of female education. His little daughter Elizabeth had scarcely set her small feet within the walls of her schoolroom when he began to interest himself, in the most lively and practical way, in all she was taught. As the girl grew older, the task of superintending her education became more and more of a joy and pride to him; for her quick intelligence, her retentive memory and her active imagination developed, as the years went on, with the marvellous rapidity of some rare tropical plant. She delighted most of all in music and poetry, and at an early age played on the piano with taste and feeling, and wrote verses that were full of sweetness and promise.

We can catch bright glimpses of her at this period; we can see the slight figure of the graceful girl glancing in and out like a flash of light among the trees of the forest, as her light step scarce crushes the spicy scent out of the herbs and flowers that are woven into the grassy carpet beneath her feet; we can mark the half-dreamy, half-thoughtful expression in the large, liquid blue eyes, as she lifts them towards the streaks of radiant summer sky that appear here and there between the waving branches; we can hear her clear young voice break out into some sweet strain of the fatherland as she answers playfully the song of thrush or blackbird perched on a twig hard by. Then we can watch her run home to the warm shelter of her parents' love, to be at once their sunbeam and their flower.

Wherever she goes we notice that she has frequently one companion that is preferred above all others, and this is a brother a few years younger than herself. He seems to have awakened in her already the mother instinct, which is the precious birthright of womanhood; for she protects and guides him, while at the same time she makes him the confidant of all her dreams and aspirations.

It was a fair, firm tie that bound that brother and sister together; a fair, firm tie, but one destined to be soon snapped asunder. The boy died early of some childish disease, and the girl was left to tread

the road of life without him. So great was the grief of the young Princess Elizabeth at this loss, that her health and spirits were seriously affected by it, and she fell into a state of physical weakness and mental despondency rare at so early an age as hers, when the most passionate storm of grief is generally soon forgotten. Her parents grew anxious and unhappy about their daughter, and felt that prompt measures must be taken if they were to prevent her following her brother. Change of scene was what the medical men most recommended; and so they sent her to Russia, to the almost maternal care of her aunt, the Archduchess Hélène.

Her mind and body gradually recovered their tone. The salon of the Archduchess was more brilliantly lit with the sparkle of wits and the flame of genius than the salon of any other woman in Europe. Amid such congenial surroundings the young Princess woke up gradually once more to the joy and sweetness of life, and body and mind regained their elasticity and vigour.

Professors and masters of all arts and sciences were employed to complete her education, and she made rapid progress in all she undertook to learn. More than all her other studies, however, were music, poetry and architecture preferred by her. Her verses began to have the ring of more than a school-girl's lively fancy in them; she delighted in dreams of fair palaces that if she were a queen she would build; she learned to play the organ and piano with wondrous skill, her fingers now lightly running over the keys, now calling forth strains of dreamy, tender sadness that made the listener weep he knew not why. Rubinstein was her master, and he called her, with pride, his favourite pupil.

Thus years sped on, till the Princess Elizabeth was a full-blown rose of womanhood. She had a form whose poetry of motion was like the swaying of the branches of her well-loved forests when the summer breeze sweeps over them; she had a face, the delicate, refined beauty of which was all instinct with the fire of thought and feeling, where imagination flashed in the eyes, and intellect sat enthroned on the broad white forehead; she had a brain waking up to a consciousness of its own power, she had a heart that beat in tune with all things high and noble.

It was just then that a sudden blight fell for a second time upon her.

The Prince of Wied died, a comparatively young man, and the blow caused the Princess Elizabeth to fall into much the same condition of mental and bodily collapse as she had done when she lost her brother. This time, however, a better and more effectual cure was at hand than even the Archduchess Hélène could devise.

Her mother, to cheer her and divert her mind, took her to Berlin and there she fell in with Prince Charles of Roumania. Similarity of tastes and opinions soon caused an attachment to spring up between him and the Princess Elizabeth, and the colour returned quickly to her cheeks, and the light to her eyes, when she was wooed

nd won, and carried off as a bride by her young husband to his outhern home.

In Roumania, her beauty, her gracious manners, her sweet, sympahetic nature soon caused the new princess to become the darling of n enthusiastic but half-civilised people. The joy of the royal pair nd of the whole nation was completed when Elizabeth became the nother of a son.

But the glad peals that welcomed the birth of an heir were rapidly o be changed into a funeral knell. In spite of all the warm sunhine of love around him the child faded away like a blossom mitten by a frosty wind, and died. This was a heavier blow for Elizabeth than even the deaths of her brother and father had been. The result was a long and dangerous illness, from which she partially ecovered to be told by her medical attendants that she was to be an nvalid for the rest of her life, and that nothing but an existence of onstant pain and suffering was before her.

The strong love of her husband rebelled against this decree, and he ook her to Holland to be under the care of the celebrated Dr. Metzger. His skill and the massage treatment completely restored her to health, nd she returned to Roumania to face once more, at her husband's ide, life and its duties. It shows that in Carmen Sylva, the poet ueen, there must be a strength of feeling such as there is in few women, that thrice she should have been brought by sorrow close to eath's door; it shows that there must have been in her a vital orce such as there is in few women, or men either, that thrice she hould have come back to life, to work, and love again.

Though she had returned to Roumania, to bring with her sunshine n the blessing of her recovered health, the bright gleam was to be of hort duration. A dark storm was about to break over Elizabeth nd the land of her adoption. The Russo-Turkish war broke out, nd Roumania was deeply implicated in the struggle. It was then hat the royal lady, who in rank was the first woman in Roumania, howed that she was in truth royal, not only by right of high birth, ut by right of her rich stores of heart and sympathy.

Through the military hospitals, arrayed in the simple dress of an rdinary ambulance nurse, with the red cross, the sign of mercy, on er sleeve, went ceaselessly to and fro one graceful figure, one face, which, in its calm brightness, brought light even to acutest physical uffering. Go where she might, the men learned to bless the very ound of their royal Elizabeth's footsteps, and her passage down the ong hospital wards was like the passage of a sunbeam sent by God. Well might Roumania's people, when the war was over, show their gratitude by setting up to her honour a statue of her holding a cup f water to a wounded soldier's lips.

After the war, the Queen of Roumania, for such now was her title, ound that she had more leisure and liberty to develop her mental gifts than she had ever had before in her checkered story. She

began to write, with the object of going into print in view; and she set about authorship, not in the dilettante spirit of an amateur, but with the resolute earnestness of a woman who means to make literature her profession.

In process of time her first book appeared, and was received with no small amount of favour by the public. Since then her writings have increased in popularity and have achieved European fame: they bear the true trade-mark of genius, and are all remarkable for womanly refinement and tenderness. Her "Pensées d'une Reine," her "Life of Sorrow," her "Contes de Peleck," etc., have become household words in many homes far away from Roumania, the beloved land of her adoption, whose legends she delights to weave into her prose and verse. Her play of "Dammerung" is popular on the German stage. At this present time an opera composed by her is being brought out in Sweden, the country where her sister reigns as Queen. She always writes under the name of "Carmen Sylva." The fact that this name has completely superseded her baptismal name of Elizabeth, and that we now almost always speak of her and write of her as Carmen Sylva, and hardly ever as Queen Elizabeth, is sufficient proof in itself of the celebrity she has gained as an author.

Carmen Sylva has carried out the architectural dream of her girlhood. At Sinaia, among the mountains, she has built a palace beautiful enough to have been raised by the magic wand of an Eastern enchantress. There she spends the greater part of the summer, and there she loves to ramble forth, watch the sunset lights play around the distant peaks, and listen to the music made by wind and stream in the hollow gorges. Then she returns to her mountain home, and delights to sit in the splendid music-room, making the organ, the keys of which she touches with masterly skill, tell of all the thoughts and fancies that glide through her fertile brain.

Carmen Sylva loves to welcome at her little court all the brightest geniuses and most intellectual men in Europe. There men of letters, artists and musicians go in and out as dear, familiar guests, and speak and act with the easy freedom of those who are at home. There Gounod dreams of melodies that shall thrill the listening world; there Alphonse Daudet rests from labours that have given joy to millions. The royal mistress of the palace at Bucharest, and the queenly summer home at Sinaia, deems it her highest royalty that she is a member of the guild of authors and artists.

Carmen Sylva has now reached middle-age, but her beauty is still bright with the brightness of soul and intellect. Her heart and brain are as full as ever of sympathy and work. For many and many a day to come may the women of Europe turn towards her eyes of reverence and love.

ALICE KING.

GUIDO FONTANA.

CHAPTER III.

THE CITY OF THE DEAD.

A LONG, low line of desolate shore facing the East. A breadth of a hundred yards or so of sand, then a scanty scrub of ragged juniper; a slight rise, and a mingling of vegetable earth with the sea-sand, and consequent growth of wiry grass and a few stunted trees. Behind these—but not more than about three hundred yards from the water—a low face of light grey rock, backed by graduated heights rising in serried series till they mingle with and are lost amid the mountains that bound the far horizon.

The face of that pale grey rock is honeycombed by innumerable tombs, cut in the living stone, and in which, in ages long gone by, unknown generations have lain. Now the tombs are the home of the bat and lizard, the serpent and every hateful creeping thing that can live without water and that delights in ruin and decay.

The tombs are of all sizes. Some consist in but a single chamber, some are composed of two or three, one within the other, and forming a very house in which the dead could sleep and the living linger to lament their loss. In all there is a low stone ledge—probably for the convenience of mourners; in most a Columbarium. Many are richly adorned with sculpture—frieze and figure, group and garland mingling, now and again, with half-obliterated inscriptions in Greek or Latin—at times in both languages. Over the doorways of some may be seen the sculptured fish that betokened the inhabitant to have been a follower of the newly-promulgated Christian Religion.

In a few of the larger tombs the traces of frescoes still remain—the reds and blues glaring out in almost pristine gaudiness—the rest of the colours a confused mass of nondescript hue.

The entrance to many of these tombs is choked by bramble and briar, through which nought but the serpent can glide; others are open to the light and the free air of heaven—to the early sunshine and the soft sea breeze. Silence, however, reigns in all. They are forsaken even by the spirits of those who once were therein housed. And, indeed, why should they have lingered on? The last mourner, too, has long gone to his rest—the ashes once so carefully cherished have been dispersed—nothing now remains but the chance visit of the prowling fox, or the yet rarer step of the casual traveller; the spider now spins where the mourner mused; the beetle crawls

where the loving wept. No—truly the spirits have done wisely to spread their wings and flee from the last scene of their earthly abode to a fairer home.

The sun was about to rise. The cloudless sky was a dome of opal, the sea a motionless mirror, over whose breast bands of blue and purple lay stretched. So light was the swell of the slumbering water that not the slightest swish was heard as it softly kissed the sands.

Far out amid the blue a shoal of dolphins were sporting—leaping with delight—rejoicing at the birth of another day. No further sign of life was visible, save the fleets of pink and blue Medusæ floating onwards in slow, voluptuous motion.

Brighter and brighter grows the zenith—radiant—ever more radiant, till, at last, a sheaf of golden arrows suddenly speed across the waters and fall in splintering showers upon the face of those ancient tombs.

But the silence yet remained unbroken. For a second the hoarse chirp of a cigala might have been heard; then that, too, ceased as abruptly as it had awoke. Not a bird twittered—not a bee hummed—it was as if a curse lay upon the spot.

Suddenly and silently a figure shows itself at the door of one of the gaping sepulchres. A woman clad in grey—a woman with a mass of snowy hair knotted behind her head—a woman with the seal of yearning and despair stamped upon every feature.

Ceaseless grief had withered her beauty as the simoon scorches the blossom; gnawing anguish had wasted her form as the greedy worm battens upon the life of the stately poplar.

With arms crossed upon her breast she gazed forth from her lair upon the slumbering sea, scanning it with eager, wistful eyes; then she turned to the left—then to the right, with a searching, expectant air that, for a moment, imparted some show of animation to her pale, suffering face. Nothing met her gaze, however, and once more her features resumed their habitual expression of stony despair. With bowed head and hands yet folded over her bosom as if to keep her heart from utterly breaking, she stepped forth from the threshold of the tomb into the full glory of the morning light. Heedless of sunshine and heat, she seated herself upon a low stone and commenced slowly rocking herself to and fro, murmuring softly the while: "My Guido—my son—my poor, poor son!"

The blasted cork tree which threw its weirdly fantastic arms up into the cloudless azure above her head was no truer picture of desolation than was that poor creature as she sat there.

The tomb she had just left was one of the largest in the City of the Dead. It had been the resting-place of a great lady—the wife of a Roman governor. Over the doorway two writhing serpents were carved, and just below them a double inscription in Latin and Greek. That inscription read as a mockery now, for within not even the dust of the dead remained. It spoke of "Eternal grief," "Ever-

lasting resting-place." Folly! Unclean things fought and fed where the patrician lady had once rested.

Again and again Greca raised her bowed head to gaze around in search of some token that might herald the approach of at least one of the two beings she loved most upon earth.

Nothing—absolutely nothing, save the tremulous heat glaring from the face of the rock—the sandy waste, with its patches of ragged shrub—the slumbering sea beyond.

She resumed her old position—recommenced her weary rocking.

Since that fatal evening on which she had been hastily summoned by a trembling, pale-faced neighbour to see her son—her Guido—in the midst of a detachment of police, life had been for her one long continuance of torture. Not even the Professor (who providentially turned up a day or so after the blow had fallen) could rouse her into anything like hopeful animation. And when all was over, when the second sentence was about to be put into execution, and when she, after infinite difficulty and no end of wearisome formalities, was admitted to bid her boy farewell, it would have been hard for any not in her intimacy to have recognised in the prematurely-aged and white-haired, broken woman the proud and exulting mother of a few months back. The good Professor did all he could to rouse her. He forced her to travel for a few weeks, but was obliged to acknowledge that change of scene only made her worse. She took interest in nothing—seemed only unceasingly to pine for a return to the old home, where every stick and stem could speak to her of the son she had lost.

They returned.

Months and months passed. Then one day, after many mysterious absences, the Professor suddenly opened his heart to Greca. He told her all that he had done and planned—all that he hoped and feared. It infused a wild, feverish life into the desolate woman's heart, which betrayed itself in ceaseless restlessness such as would soon have worn out a constitution less tenacious than hers.

Her state, moral as well as material, mended, however. Where the doctor had before had to wrestle with apathy, he had now to combat excitement.

The undertaking was about as serious a one as could well be imagined, and failure, as well as success, involved consequences which had carefully to be weighed and provided against.

But rare intelligence, unswerving affection, unstinted money, a certain favourable combination of circumstances, and, more than all, untiring energy, at last produced their fruits. The plot was organised with a fair prospect of success, and the hour of its final execution had struck.

Greca had sojourned in Cagliari for a while under the roof of trustworthy friends of the Professor, to whom they owed their all, and for whom they would have sacrificed everything. She had stayed with

them in the quality of a relation, and not a soul in the whole town besides them ever dreamed that the dark-eyed, white-haired, weary woman had an only child serving his time in the near establishment of San Bartolomeo.

In his heart the Professor had condemned it as an imprudence, but he had been unable to resist her prayers and entreaties to be suffered, at least, to inhabit for a while the vicinity of her son's place of confinement. He at last had yielded.

What long hours she passed gazing with yearning wistfulness upon the walls that held her Guido, everyone can easily imagine. She had gazed at them under the light of early dawn—in the glow of the mid-day sun, beneath the white moonlight—gazed at them till the tears scorched and blinded, till, in a paroxysm of longing agony, she had flung herself upon the ground and wailed forth the anguish that was too bitter to be borne. And once she had seen him! Her Guido had passed within a few feet of her, amid the bustle and turmoil of the vessels unloading at the wharf. She had heard his voice, too, in reply to some observation from a fellow convict. Her hostess, who was with her, had divined the whole—had felt the steely clutch upon her arm, marked the stifled sob—and had guessed which was Guido among the men passing before them.

Maternal love had lent strength, had restrained the impulse to rush forward and fling longing, loving arms around the convict; and the son little dreamed that the closely-veiled woman, whose dress he almost brushed in passing, was his own adored mother.

How all this, and much more that it would be needless to relate, surged through Greca's brain as she cowered there!

The sun burned down in the fiery fierceness of noon. Everything around lay simmering in sunshine, steeped in light. Yet still she sat on, unheeding of personal discomfort, her whole soul engrossed in one thought, her whole being centred in the long wistful gaze with which she from time to time swept the horizon.

Mechanically she drew a piece of bread from her pocket and commenced eating it. It nearly choked her, but she knew she must do something to keep up her strength for the unknown that lay before her. There were more substantial victuals hidden in the tomb behind her; she could not have touched them—they must be shared by her son.

As yet nothing but the snake gliding on its stealthy way had met her eye, nought but the rustle of the lizard met her ear.

Then, all at once—it must have been near two—a boat suddenly rounded the little point from the north. It kept close in to shore, and was rowed by two men, while a third sat steering. Her heart beat to bursting, and the blood, rushing to her head, obscured her sight so that she could distinguish nothing clearly.

Were they friends? Were they foes?

She hastily drew back into the depths of the tomb behind her.

Minutes passed. They seemed ages to her. She heard the sound of voices, the grating of the keel upon the shore, the clatter of oars flung upon the gunwale. Whoever they might be, they had landed. Holding her breath, she stole to just within the entrance and tried to listen. In vain. Then the thud of heavy steps upon the sand drove her back once more to the darkest depths. Was it the voice of a friend that she was about to hear calling to her to "come forth" to renewed life and hope? Or was it to be the harsh command of the law to surrender? Her nails dug themselves into the stuff that covered her breast.

But, without halting, the steps passed on. Then they again died away.

She listened—listened—listened—till every nerve seemed to vibrate, and a humming sound awoke within her brain.

Suspense was no longer bearable; if she had had to remain longer thus, she must have shrieked aloud. She sprang forwards and carefully looked out. It was not her Guido who had passed—she would, even upon the sand, have recognised his step among a thousand; and, besides, he, if he came at all, would come from landways, and not by sea. Guido—Guido—where was he at that moment? Making his weary way across the country—in the hands of his pursuers—shot down, perhaps? The thought pierced her like a knife.

She advanced her head softly beyond the lintel; she looked out. Her heart gave a bound of thankfulness; there, seated upon a stone not ten yards off, sat the Professor, trying to obtain a little shade from a group of scraggy junipers, and busily mopping his streaming face with the old familiar red silk handkerchief.

Greca rushed forwards. "Guido?" broke from her lips.

"Will be here ——"

"When—oh, when?"

"Probably soon after nightfall; I cannot tell exactly; that must depend upon circumstances."

"God be thanked! Oh, God be thanked!"

"All I really know is that he got away safe from San Bartolomeo, and that the whole place has been in a ferment ever since. I wish I could have been there to see it."

"My God, make me grateful for this; make me grateful!"

She fell upon her knees and turned her poor worn face up into the full light of the golden day.

"My Guido, my Guido!" she continued to murmur softly.

Then, for the first time, the Professor was able to read the ravages that grief had made. He gently stretched out his hand and raised her. She seated herself at his side.

"It seems that they lost all trace of him close to the cliffs of St. Elia. The police think that he must have fallen into the sea."

"Killed, perhaps —— ?"

"As much as you or I. The police are fools. So much the better. They think he is drowned, or pretend to think so, in order to screen themselves. Well, let them think what they please. I know better than that. The clothes that I had hidden in the Fortezza Vecchia are gone; so are the provisions. That's quite enough for the present."

The Professor smiled his own peculiar, quiet smile. That smile always broke over his honest Piedmontese features when he was inwardly satisfied with himself and the world at large. Greca had seen it a hundred times, and had learned to interpret it aright. It quieted her more than any words could have done.

"And now, my dear, let us leave Guido to reach here as best he can, and think over what yet remains for us to do."

He laid the red handkerchief upon his bald head, and then, taking out a little bag from his pocket, carefully began the manipulation of a cigarette.

"You see, all is ready for the arrival of the poor boy, and, once here, we can start directly. I am sure of my two men yonder, and quite as sure of those left behind in the felucca. She is anchored round that point yonder. Once on board, we have nothing more to fear."

"But if the felucca should be seen ——?"

"She won't. She is hidden from seawards in a little bay that I discovered when I was here three years or so ago."

Greca seized the good man's hand and kissed it in passionate gratitude.

"Oh, what should we have done without you?" she murmured. The words were commonplace enough, but the tone and action told all she felt.

"You see, I am here upon one of my archæological expeditions, in case any stupid questions should be asked. I am not so quite unknown as to render further explanations necessary."

Here the familiar smile appeared once more. Unwittingly he gave a passing thought to certain articles that had lately appeared in most of the papers, and to the flattering reception he had been summoned to receive from the king.

What a comedy it was, too, to be smiled upon by Royalty just at the very moment when he was deep in plotting escape for one of his Majesty's prisoners! He had enjoyed the audience with a double zest.

"And in the whole business, I defy the most keen-sighted and sharp-nosed policeman ever invented to scent out my having had anything to do with Guido's flight."

He said nothing about the little fortune it had already cost him.

"If needful I can account for every day of my life during the last year and more, and bring very big people indeed to bear witness to the truth of what I affirm."

"Ah, if only Guido can get here in safety!"

"Of course he will get here in safety. Why should he not? Guido is no baby—he knows quite well what he has to do, and how to do it. Don't you be uneasy about that."

He mentally added that the experience of the last few years must have largely contributed to the opening of the poor lad's eyes—though not perhaps in a manner quite compatible with the usual notions of good education.

They talked over the ways and means—or, rather, the Professor talked and Greca listened—yet, still, the hours seemed terribly long to them both. Dinner, if dinner it could be called, was taken in the coolest recess of one of the airiest tombs; the provisions that the Professor had taken care to bring with him being added to those already in store. The meal was spread upon the broad, low slab on which, in centuries long swept into the womb of time, the form of the dead had lain, or the weeping survivor sat.

The Professor insisted upon Greca's making a good meal. It was ridiculous, he said, that she should starve herself. It was worse than ridiculous: it was rightdown sinful. A moment of physical weakness on her part might, perhaps, bring about some complication or another that, in its turn, could jeopardise the success of the whole enterprise. No: eat she must. So Greca eat, and, in justice, was obliged to confess to feeling all the better for having done so.

But, linger as they might, they could not sit there all the afternoon. So Greca was ordered to go and get a good sound sleep in the darkest, dreamiest place within the tombs that she could find, while the Professor roamed about, examining sculptures and inscriptions, as he had done once before on that same spot years ago. It served to occupy his mind and somewhat to allay the anxiety he could not help feeling. Nor was this all: it gave such a natural colouring to the appearance of himself and his men upon the place that, even had the police made their appearance, it would not have mattered so very much.

Greca had received strict orders not to stir from the tomb into which she had retired until the Professor himself should come to fetch her. She had eaten to please him—the sleeping, however, was quite a different matter. She tried right loyally to obey, but utterly in vain. There she lay in one of the inner chambers, gazing wearily at the Columbarium on the one side and at the blurred frescoes on the other. The dilapidated faces loomed dimly forth from the opposite wall; the faint light gave them a spectral appearance. Sleep! she could almost have laughed to herself as she tried to obey the Professor's behest.

Ah! would those weary hours never pass? That blazing sun never sink? She sickened at the very thought of its beating—beating—beating down outside in its red glare and wrathful intensity.

Sickened as she pictured to herself her son exposed to its scourge—harassèd—faltering—fainting, perhaps, beneath his burden of privation, anxiety and fatigue. She turned and turned restlessly, ever trying some other posture.

In vain.

Little by little, however, a strange sensation took possession of her. Every faculty seemed to acquire quintuple power; a succession of thrills ran through her entire frame, neither painful nor unpleasant, to be succeeded by a peculiar sensation of cold at the back of her head. Then followed a hot wave—then another—as if the fevered blood were surging up in measured beat to her brain. Then another thrill more icy than before.

Walls and vaulted roof seemed to melt into nought. She saw, heard, and felt as she had never seen, heard, and felt before—it was like floating away through space itself, with no more body or weight than that of a spirit borne upon the wings of the wind.

A deep forest. Trees rising around as they had risen there for centuries, and with here and there some giant veteran lying low and rotting within the green shroud spread over it by a thousand parasite plants. Masses of pink and white cyclamen blooming forth from every crevice, nestling amid velvety moss, nodding from rocky cleft; here a tangle of trailing climbers, there an open space steeped in sunshine.

Further yet: a thicket of lithe oleander in full bloom, but with their blossoms somewhat paled from the shade in which they are growing. Higher still, a belt of thorny shrubs such as seem never to have been penetrated by man, and within, on the summit of the rise, one of those mysterious towers called Nurraghe, whose builders none can name, whose birth is shrouded in night.

A low, massive tower, set together with mortarless blocks, such as the boasted mechanical means of the present day would shrink from attempting to move. Blocks quarried none can guess where; blocks cut and fitted with a precision that tells of hands as practised as powerful. She gazes on it with a curious sort of interest; gazes as if she were another being altogether, and no longer the weary woman tossing and turning within the tomb down yonder.

She sees a man within the tower. His dress is that of a well-to-do farmer; he has a wallet at his side.

She recognises him; or, rather, her other self recognises him. It is Guido.

She struggles to reach him, but an invisible power is holding her back. He comes forth from his hiding-place and, wallet upon shoulder, sets forward upon his journey.

The sun is sinking slowly in the west.

Guido halts at a little spring that trickles silently down from a mass of dark red rock. He drinks a deep draught, washes his face and hands, and then sets forth once more.

But what is it that she now sees? Out from the ruins and lebris of that old Roman mine a something has stealthily crept—a something that, in spite of her efforts, she cannot clearly define.

Is it a serpent? Is it a man? Now it is the one—now the other. There, now it is both!

It is one of the serpents carved over the doorway of the Roman princess's tomb. But the face? For it has a human face—small, vicious eyes, and an expression full of mistrust and guile.

It wriggles forth upon the track of the wanderer; passes where he has passed—halting where he has halted—never taking those hateful eyes from off him.

Had she but the power to warn him!

Guido has crossed the forest, and has entered upon a more open tract. Here woods alternate with natural fields, upon which the short, thick grass grows green and sweet, and across which innumerable sheep-tracks intercept each other.

The serpent is still there; closely following every deviation and turn.

How can it escape Guido's notice? Why, once it was quite close to him for a moment—glaring up at him from behind some bushes! Yes, the face is human, but then the expression!

On Guido tramps. Now lost to sight in some rocky hollow—now reappearing upon some rising ridge. Ever onwards in the direction of the sea.

Lower sinks the sun—longer grow the shadows. The heat is still intense, but the odour of brine begins at intervals to mingle with the sickly scent of the fainting flowers.

Lower—lower—lower. The golden disk touches the distant mountain crest. It seems to halt for a moment as if to fling a last, lingering farewell to earth, then suddenly drops behind the purple curtain.

The freshness of evening floats up from the waters.

The serpent grows dim amid the gathering shadows. Greca can no longer follow its gliding. As the deepening gloom swallows it from view, she fancies she hears an ominous hiss.

That may be but the sound of the waking wavelets pressing forwards to kiss the shore.

On comes the traveller.

The last ridge is crossed. He is just above the long, low line of enantless tombs.

There—the first star gleams forth from overhead; Guido's first tep grates upon the sand below.

And the serpent?

Greca—the real Greca—starts from her rocky bed. Surely that as the Professor's voice? She springs forward and is folded in her on's embrace.

Night, dark, mysterious, beautiful, hung heavily over earth and

sea. No light save the soft glimmer of the stars which mirrored themselves in the waters—vault above and reflection below forming one immense globe of unspeakable glory.

Everything was prepared—nothing now remained but to embark in the boat in which the two men were already seated ready at their oars. The Professor, followed by Greca and her son, led the way down to the beach.

Then a sudden cry like that of a night-bird arose from a near patch of lentisks. Seized with momentary terror, Greca started at the sound and stopped. Looking round, she caught sight of something stealing through the bushes; at the same moment an exclamation of dismay broke from the Professor.

A large boat, heavily manned, swept round the point, and, looming like a phantom through the gloom, lay to in such a position as to render his own boat of no further avail.

The gleam of arms and uniform was faintly visible.

"Surrender," echoed a loud, commanding voice; "surrender in the name of the law!"

Then from the brushwood around dim forms are seen to rise on every side like spirits from their tombs. They look gigantic in the gloom; they appear innumerable to the straining eyes of the little party; they draw nearer and form a circle around the fugitives; then halt.

"Guido Fontana, I arrest you as an escaped convict. Greca Fontana and Giovanni dell 'Nero, I arrest you likewise as abettors of his flight."

The officer's voice rang forth loud and clear. It fell like ice upon the hearts of those to whom it was directed.

"Run for it, Guido," whispered the Professor; "it is the last chance."

The words had been softly uttered, but eager, listening ears had either caught the sound, or divined their import.

An ominous click resounded through the darkness.

For a second Guido hesitated. The case was a desperate one. There was no hope of getting off—in his heart he well knew that—but there was the chance of their shooting him down as he ran, and thus putting an end to a life he no longer cared to preserve.

He pressed his mother convulsively to his breast; kissed her as if his whole soul had concentrated itself upon his clinging lips. Then there was a sudden bound—a momentary collision—a policeman struck to earth. Guido's lithe form was dimly discernible running at full speed along the shore.

"The unhappy boy," moaned the Professor; "why does he not take to the woods? He must have lost his senses."

But he hadn't. Aim would have been difficult and uncertain amid the bushes—upon the white sand it would probably be just.

A volley of oaths—a scattered discharge—a piercing shriek.

Greca reeled and was caught in the Professor's arms. They were nstantly surrounded. A large blood-stain upon the bosom of her dress showed where an ill-directed bullet had struck her.

The shriek had reached Guido's ear. No bullet could have stayed his course more effectually. He stopped and turned. Almost at the same instant his pursuers were upon him.

They led him back to the group upon the strand.

In its centre lay Greca, her head supported by the Professor, who was kneeling beside her. Soldiers, policemen, boatmen stood around them—pity and consternation upon their rough faces. Not a word was spoken. Every eye was fixed upon the dying woman. For dying she was. The life-blood had been staunched for the moment, but that was all. The Professor, while supporting her with one arm, was holding a handkerchief to the wound with the other.

Greca made a motion to cover up her breast, which lay partly exposed. One of the bystanders, a young sergeant, stepped forward and laid his handkerchief reverently across her bosom. She thanked him with a look.

At this moment Guido was brought up.

"Back—back," cried the officer in command; "don't you see—?" But it was too late. Guido had caught sight of his mother lying there. He would have wrenched himself free from those that held him, but there was no need. They let him go, contenting themselves with drawing up the circle somewhat closer. There was no thought of escape in Guido's mind at that moment.

Frantic with grief he flung himself down beside his mother.

"Mother—mother," he moaned. "What is it? What have they done to you?"

Greca opened her heavy eyes and gazed up at her son. A faint smile played over her features. And what a smile! The essence of all earthly love and the foretaste of heavenly peace commingled!

"Guido—my Guido," she softly murmured. There was a pause. Then she moved one arm as if to embrace him. Her strength failed her. Guido bent over her—his face close to hers. Again the smile broke forth—fainter than before, but, if possible, even purer and sweeter. Then with a sudden convulsive effort one arm was flung round her son's neck, while the other was raised to heaven. The smile brightened. Then she drew his lips to hers.

A long, clinging kiss, one deep-drawn sigh, and, with her right hand still pointing to the stars above her son's head, the mother's soul floated into Eternity.

Guido is still dragging out his weary life in a Bagnio.

The Professor has left Italy, never to return.

A. B.

THE LYNNS OF LINNTOWER.

By Rosa Mackenzie Kettle, Author of "The Mistress of Langdale Hall," etc. etc.

IN some parts of Scotland, spring is very tardy and yet premature. There are days of unclouded brilliancy and warm sunshine, while yet the snow drifts to great depths among the hills and lies smoothly on the braes.

Sheltered underneath high wooded crags from the cruel north-easterly gale lay a garden and a cottage: I mention its surroundings first, for they were of much more size and importance than the dwelling. Great care had been bestowed upon the beds, and borders, and smooth greensward; while on the abode of living beings there was little ornament except well-pruned fruit trees.

These were cultivated more for utility than beauty. Not an inch of the sunny south wall was wasted in mere ornament for the pleasure of the inmates of the cottage. On the front, where the aspect was most favourable, grew a few apricot trees, carefully protected now from the keen blast; one of the Moor-Park species—of which, after a certain age, one bough dies annually, but which was in its prime—and a fine golden plum. Only the north side and a portion swept by the easterly blast were abandoned to hardy roses and a Virginian creeper. Even this was now leafless, showing no trace of colour. Below were currant bushes nailed against the wall.

There had been a week milder than usual, even in that sheltered situation. Spring flowers had come up and blossomed early in the rich mould of the borders. Like the turtle, the crow and the swallow, they know their time, and, except under very exceptional circumstances, come to gladden us when it arrives.

Now they were paying the price of their temerity. After they expanded, snow fell heavily, crocus and aconite, snowdrop and hepatica, bowed their pretty heads beneath it, but lifted them again, almost uninjured, when the spring sunshine melted that heavy weight.

They were planted, as is the English custom, in the beds and borders, not in the grass, and, consequently, after the flowers withered, their tender leaves and stalks escaped falling under the mower's scythe. Undisturbed from year to year, they grew and multiplied, purple, white, golden and lilac clumps of crocus and snowdrop, arranged alternately. Here and there pink, white and blue hepaticas and more timid primroses and polyanthus peeped forth, and even, under veiling snow wreaths, a few lingering Christmas roses and buds of wallflowers.

But the neighbouring mountains wore their white wintry hoods

and, at their base, masses, which look so feathery while falling, yet are so heavy, lay pure and soft and white. Beneath the snowdrifts many a patient sheep lay hidden, safer than in the open, but many more had perished during the recent sudden storm.

Trains had been retarded, snow ploughs had been busy; traffic had been nearly at a standstill through the north country for the last week.

A girl was standing on the steps under the porch at the entrance of the cottage, scattering crumbs for the birds. Not poultry—the garden was too precious to permit their intrusion from the back premises—but robins, finches, blackbirds and sparrows. They came close to her; the robins fed from her hand. She was tall and well-proportioned; not slender and willowy, like women brought up in cities, but with strength and agility in every motion, health in her warm, clear complexion, and security in her firm yet elastic tread.

But there was a cloud upon her brow, sadness in every gesture. The little birds seemed aware of it, and cooed and twittered, and clustered round as if to comfort her. Her movements were gentle. She had learnt the secret of taming, by her stillness and serenity, the wild creatures round her dwelling, and taught them not to fear her.

They all swooped away when suddenly a large retriever dashed into the hitherto charmed circle at her feet. His curly hair was matted and tangled, and there was a wistful, weary look in his eyes as though he sorely needed food and rest, but he would not eat the bread she offered him. He laid his paw on her arm, and looked up in her face, beseechingly, with his large brown faithful eyes full of tears and love.

"What is it, Hector?" she said in pure English, putting her arm, though his dark coat was covered with snow and mud, round the dog's neck, and waiting as if she expected an answer. "What can I do for you?" she added, after a pause.

The dog whined and caught the sleeve of her jacket, then he threw back his head and howled, looking first at her and then at the snow-clad moorland and the mountain heights.

As if remembering that a renewal of strength might be needful, he lapped some milk from a saucer inside the porch and ate some morsels of bread from her hand. Then he bounded off, but waited at a short distance, barking, and evidently expecting her to follow him.

In a few moments the birds were again picking up the scattered crumbs undisturbed. The girl had snatched a plaid from a hook in the passage, and was crossing the snow, which still retained the marks of his footprints, with the dog.

In places the ground was covered deeply, but the sagacious guide indicated where his companion might safely tread, often standing still and watching her anxiously when a difficult bit had to be surmounted. In the sunshine the snow had partially melted, but in

the shadows it lay deep and was firm under her light tread. She walked with the easy gait of a mountaineer, one accustomed to face all varieties of weather, and to study all the signs whereby she might win on her way safely.

The dog turned off from the direction of the Pass into the Highlands and went along the track made by his own footprints, which were in places fast filling with water, into some low marshy ground at the foot of the hills. Here walking was more difficult, being impeded by slippery slabs of ice.

At last he stopped short where the snow, which had fallen heavily the night before, had drifted. Hector ran round and round, howling frantically. At last a low moan replied to his appeal; and, out of the great heap of snow, a little silver-haired terrier crept disconsolately. Then they both began to scratch away with all their might at the white mass.

Fortunately that warm fleecy covering had preserved the life buried beneath it. After a few minutes the drifts were upheaved and a human form rose slowly above it, wearily shaking off the flakes. The girl, who had lent her aid vigorously to the dogs, gave a joyful cry, but it was not answered. The tall figure swayed, tottered, and, half-risen, fell prostrate; life was at a low ebb, strength was gone.

But youth is sanguine, and hope had sprung up sufficiently to revive its energies. The half-frozen fingers clasped the warm human hand stretched out to aid him. That touch seemed electrical. The blood once more flowed to the extremities which had curdled round his heart. His fingers grasped hers as she wrapped him in her own plaid, and, unconsciously, drew his shivering form close to her own.

Hector, barking joyously, threw himself upon them, nearly knocking them both down in his vehemence. The little terrier whined affectionately, but lacked strength to do more than lick the hand with which the girl patted and stroked its silvery curls, saying, "Poor little Madge," and feeding her gently with a few crumbs from the pocket of her own jacket.

Guided by a mute sign, she found in the traveller's vest a small flask in which still lurked a few drops of the cordial which had saved his life during the night passed in the snowdrift. He had been too weak to reach it again until her voice and Hector's bark recalled him to life. After drinking what remained in the flask, he found voice enough to utter a few words of thanks; that done, he seemed inclined to sink down to sleep—that fatal repose which, if indulged in under such circumstances, knows no awaking.

The young woman, who knew the danger, roused him peremptorily. She asked no questions; for she knew the dogs, and guessed that the stranger was a visitor at a neighbouring mansion during the fishing season. No doubt his friends would be seeking for him far and wide and might come to her dwelling, since there were very few habitations

at which to inquire for the missing guest, and those few were far apart.

The best thing she could do was to take him home with her and give him food and rest. She, too, was shivering with cold, having parted with her own plaid to warm him. The Hall was too far off for her to attempt to guide him there.

Calling the dogs to follow them, and bidding the stranger lean upon her, the girl drew him away, reluctantly, from the snowdrift. He said no word, but threw the end of the plaid round them both, holding fast by her strong rounded arm.

The touch again revived him; and so, walking very slowly, clinging together as the icy wind swept past, with the glad bark of the dog to cheer them, and the little weary terrier in the girl's arms, for it had soon tired and begged to be carried, Ellen Redfern led the exhausted Englishman to her solitary home at the foot of the snow-clad hills.

It was a long, toilsome way; but to pause meant death, so she made him bear onward to shelter and warmth. Once he said, hoarsely, "Leave me," and nearly sank down; but she raised him tenderly, as a mother might the child clinging to her skirts. At last the cottage, with its cultivated garden, gay borders of crocuses peeping out, on which the declining sun was shining, came in view across the wide waste of snow-clad moorland.

II.

Ellen Redfern's one servant stood in the porch before the cottage, looking out anxiously for her mistress. She was dressed very plainly, in respectable family mourning for her master, who had died in the early part of the previous winter. Though the earth was covered with snow it had come borne on March breezes. It was spring now.

Perhaps Aggy Mervyn shared the superstitious belief that one rescued from a storm, whether on land or sea, bears ill-luck to the roof which shelters him. The snow looked like a wide ocean; its waves breaking in foam on the breakers were hardly more cruel and dangerous. Her brow clouded over when she saw the two figures battling against the wind, wrapped in one plaid.

She did not advance a step to meet them, but stood shading her eyes with her hand, until the retriever crouched at her feet; then she patted his head kindly.

"What sent ye here through the snowdrifts, Hector?" she said; "and what luck have ye brought us? I'm thinking it's but an ill wind and small good."

"Don't say that, Aggy," said her young mistress. "It's life instead of death. This brave dog has saved life to-day, and must be rewarded: let him have food and drink; and prepare my father's room for this stranger."

Ellen spoke in the tone of one accustomed to prompt obedience;

and the housekeeper, calling the dog, retired to the kitchen, while her mistress, unwrapping the plaid from her own person, but not withdrawing her arm, led her guest indoors.

It was, as we have said, a very unpretentious abode, but comfortably furnished and neatly kept. A bright fire was burning in the parlour, of which the door stood open, as well as another nearly opposite, leading into an apartment where the master of the house had slept. The inner room was full of choice plants, ranged in order on shelves under a wide bay window intended for their accommodation, with sliding panes and cut up high into the roof.

This room had been added on to the cottage, and with its southern aspect formed a sort of greenhouse. It was thoroughly aired, fires having been kept up night and day there during the cold weather for the sake of the tender plants.

There were curious specimens of foliage growth, of ferns, and various floral delicacies not common in ordinary greenhouses. All were evidently objects of love and constant care; there were blinds to shield them from the danger of sunshine after frost, and not a single dead leaf had been left upon them.

The girl sighed as they passed through the front room. She paused at the open door of the very simply-appointed inner chamber.

"Here you will be quite warm and tranquil," she said, in her pure English tone and quiet manner. "Aggy will bring you some tea here or in the parlour."

The stranger closed the door with a shiver.

"Oh, let it be *here*," he said. "Stay with me—I cannot, after that terrible night, bear to be alone."

He sank down as he spoke on the sofa beside the fire. Ellen stirred the logs, which sparkled cheerily.

For some moments they were both silent. It was, indeed, only by a strong effort that the bonds which bound the stranger's half-frozen tongue were loosened.

Aggy brought in the tea-tray, and stopped to remove some of their guest's wet wrappings. Under his cloak and leggings his raiment, which was of rough tweed, was tolerably dry. She took away with her also Ellen's thick jacket, which was plentifully sprinkled with snow, and her black plumed hat and warm gloves.

The place had a homely, pleasant aspect in the bright blaze of some fir-cones which she had thrown on the burning logs. The firelight sparkled on the glass and china, which were much handsomer than might have been expected. Each article had an inscription upon it, but the stranger was too languid for investigation.

"They were all prizes," said Ellen simply, as her eyes followed his glance. "This one for dahlias at the grand show at York; this for carnations, and these flower-glasses for asters. My lord gave this old-fashioned silver cup to my father when the new conservatories were finished, and his favourite stove plants preserved through

a bitter winter owing to great care and skill. I am very proud of them all."

"No wonder," said the visitor, reviving in the warmth as he drank the fragrant cup of tea she placed before him. "You ought not to wait upon me; but I confess I feel unwilling to stir from this cosy corner."

The Englishman was, indeed, so completely exhausted that he did not notice that the girl, after waiting upon him, touched nothing herself; but moved about the room arranging matters necessary for his comfort, and then silently withdrew.

He was too tired even for thought, and lay back on the couch in the warm, pleasant atmosphere, after she carried away the tea-things, till sleep stole upon him.

During brief intervals of half consciousness he heard some slight muffled sounds from the adjoining room, which had another door into the passage, but nothing roused him. After the dreadful night in the snowdrift the hushed room, even the light symptoms of humanity stirring near him, and the perfume of the violets blooming in wicker cases in the windows, soothed him speedily again into slumber.

He woke up at last when the woman-servant opened the door into the bed-chamber and told him that it was quite ready for his occupation. She brought him, presently, a neatly-arranged supper-tray, and asked if he would require anything more.

"May I see and thank my kind hostess?" he said. "I fear I have brought a great trouble upon you both."

"The trouble is nothing, sir," she said, quietly. "You will find plenty of hot and cold water for your bath, and I will bring a fresh supply to this door in the morning. I hope you will find the bed comfortable and have a good night's rest. My mistress is very sorry that she has no messenger to send to the Hall. The drifts are heavy, and there is a good nine miles of moorland to cross."

She retired without answering his request, making a very respectful, old-fashioned curtsey. Though civil, her manner was extremely reserved. Something in her quiet bearing checked the questions which the stranger longed to ask.

He drew the reading-lamp which she had set down nearer to him, and took without moving, haphazard, some books from a hanging shelf on the wall close to the sofa. The collection was not an inspiring one. It consisted of gardening books and catalogues. Having studied the pictures of prize dahlias, carnations and asters, the proper seasons for various gardening operations in beds and borders, and the best modes of keeping lawns free from weeds, and eradicating them from gravel walks, of laying out parterres and pleasure grounds, he again became drowsy and closed the illustrated volumes and numbers.

His limbs felt stronger. He got up and paced the floor from end to end of the narrow limits, rejoicing in returning strength. Then he

went to the window and opened the hasp of the tightly-fastened shutters.

Outside, all was still and cold as death. It was a bright, frosty night. Stars and moon were shining out intensely, like gas, in the firmament, which was blue as steel.

On one side the snow-clad moorland stretched away to the base of the mountain ranges, which raised their clearly-defined outlines against the sky. On the other lay the sleeping flowers of the garden, now tightly folded up, but the colours of the great masses of crocus—purple and lilac, silver and gold, alternately—distinctly visible. The snowdrops, pearly white, caught the moonbeams as they lifted themselves above the edge of the grassy bank.

A brilliant planet sparkled like fire above the trees that sheltered the garden, and myriads of lesser luminaries, like glow-worms up aloft, twinkled in the frosty night air above the hills, and were reflected in the ice-bound burn which usually wound trickling among the shrubs and flowers.

The Englishman shivered and, closing the shutters, went back to the fireside; but restlessness had come upon him after his intermittent slumbers. He went to the door of the room and opened it, stepping out into the passage, which was lighted by a lamp which burnt more steadily than the twinkling stars.

As he stood, motionless, unwilling to break bounds, yet feeling trammelled, like a caged squirrel, within the precincts assigned to him, he heard the gentle murmur of a voice reading aloud, but not loudly, and he saw that a door at the end of the passage was standing a little open.

Involuntarily he drew nearer, having caught a word or two which he recognised; and feeling that it was no sin to intrude, very gently he entered, without disturbing its inmates, the comfortable, homely kitchen, which glowed with fire and lamp-light.

The girl who had drawn him from under the snowdrift was sitting by the white wood table, with the little silver-haired terrier fast asleep in her arms. The older woman sat opposite, with her knitting lying near her, but unoccupied, her hands clasped, listening to her young mistress. Neither of them noticed the entrance of the stranger.

Ellen Redfern was reading from the Scriptures in a pure, soft voice, and after a few moments they both knelt down and prayed. The young man, keeping in shadow, noiselessly followed their example.

Tears, such as he had not shed since boyhood and which he now restrained, filled his eyes as he heard the girl in simple phrases give thanks for the preservation of the stranger now sheltered beneath her roof, and pray for the safety of all travellers by land and sea.

The English servant fervently responded to her young mistress's prayers and thanksgivings.

When they rose from their knees their visitor came forward and apologised for having ventured to join in their devotions. He could

not say that he regretted his boldness, since it had given him the opportunity of returning thanks for the great mercy extended towards him.

Then he bade them good-night without another word, and retired to his own quarters.

The woman and the girl were both silent. They put away reverentially the large old Bible and Prayer Book, kissed each other like mother and daughter, and retired to rest.

The little dog lay in Ellen's arms, with the long curly hair falling over the sleeve of her black dress as she went upstairs. The moon and stars shone down over the sleeping flowers and on the moorland covered with snow as yet almost untrodden. There were only the slight tracks upon it of the retriever, the youth, and the maiden.

III.

THE peculiar brilliancy of the moon and stars, as is often the case, preluded a day of gloom. Heavily fell the snow in the early morning, obliterating the few footprints on the moor. Snowdrops and crocuses bowed their heads mournfully. Not a trace of their gay purple and gold and lilac petals was visible.

The Englishman chafed at his imprisonment. He had risen early, refreshed by unbroken sleep, after the fatigue and unrest of the previous day and night, hoping to return to his sporting companions and relieve their anxiety.

Breakfast was laid neatly in the parlour, but there was no one to welcome him—fresh eggs, golden butter, well-fried rashers of ham—but there was no white hand extended to greet him, or to pour out the tea—he looked at the goodly viands with distaste. He thought that he would greatly have preferred sharing his pretty hostess and the comely housekeeper's breakfast in the cosy kitchen.

Nevertheless he made a sufficient repast, feeling that he would need all his energies to cross the snow-clad waste. He could not trespass longer on a girl's hospitality, turning her out of her sitting-room, and abridging her scanty resources, when it appeared likely that there might be some difficulty about replenishing her stores in that remote spot.

The birds were twittering in the porch, and, when he went to the house-door, Ellen was feeding them. She accosted him shyly, asking if he had slept well, or whether the wind, which rose after the moon went down, had disturbed him.

"No, I heard nothing," he said; "your lavender-scented pillows lulled me into forgetfulness. It was quite a shock to see this fresh downfall of snow. By the way, what has become of Hector? I see you have Madge still with you."

"Hector was away home soon after he felt assured of your safety," said the girl. "Aggy fed him, and he bounded off across the moor,

straight as the crow flies. Your friends would know that you had found shelter, otherwise he would not have left you, or he would give them no peace till they set out to seek for you."

"I, too, must be up and away," said her guest, looking rather disconsolately across the moor. "Can you give me any landmarks to steer by? I do not care to pass another night in a snowdrift, without the hope of an angel to rescue me."

Ellen looked grave. "You could not find your way without a guide," she said. "It would be tempting Providence. You must wait patiently for awhile. Perhaps some of your friends may come here in search of you."

'Then you must let me be one of the family. I cannot bear to disturb you," said the Englishman. "Tell me if there is anything I can do. Shall I sweep away the snow from your threshold?"

"Yes, you may do that if you like, when it has ceased to fall," said Ellen, laughing. "You would have to do your work all over again in half-an-hour. Aggy thinks that in the afternoon it will be fine. She knows all the signs of the weather, though she was born far from here, on the Northumbrian moors."

"You, too, are English—you have not the least accent—you are my countrywoman?" the young man said inquiringly.

"My mother was English, but my father was a Scotchman. I was born on the other side of the border, and brought up there, till my father wearied of the country and came back to his own land."

"I saw the name of Linntower in some of the books in your sitting-room," said the guest. "Was that where you lived?"

"No," said the girl reservedly; "I was never there in my life. My father knew the place, but he seldom mentioned it. There it was, I believe, that he married my mother, but they must have come away immediately afterwards. I can tell you no more."

She turned away abruptly, and went back into the house, leaving the little basket of crusts which she had been breaking up for the birds on the shelf. The young man abstractedly crumbled the pieces of bread and then returned to the parlour.

He took down some books from a case at the farther end of the room from the hanging shelf containing the gardening books, and tried to amuse himself, but the girl's words haunted him.

Instead of reading their contents he found himself constantly engaged in examining the title-pages, fly-leaves, and covers. There was but little indication of the circumstances and standing of their owners. Some were the property of the girl, Ellen Redfern, with dates of possession at various ages and in different places. Others had belonged to her father, Alexander Redfern.

At last he came to another name, written in a delicate Italian hand, and at this he looked for some time in silence. His face flushed and then paled as he laid that volume on one side.

More than once in the course of that long, dull, solitary morning

the young Englishman looked again at that name and date, always remaining, afterwards, for some time in a deep reverie.

The address in the volume was "Linntower," the time more than twenty years before the day when he sat gazing upon it, sadly and thoughtfully, in the parlour of the Highland cottage.

All things come to an end, and the great snowstorm was not an exception. On the third day after the night passed in the snowdrift, the stranger woke to see the sun shining, the birds singing, the burn running past the garden. A rapid thaw had set in, and he was free.

Aggy Mervyn had found a messenger to send in the early morning to the Hall, and a light carriage was sent to bring back the missing guest. As he shook hands with his young hostess, a slight, perhaps unconscious, pressure was perceptible to both. Ellen blushed and sighed.

With genuine hospitality Miss Redfern had asked no questions, but her guest before they parted had made known his name and something of his private history. He was a distant relation of Lord Linntower, at whose castle near the border Ellen's father had lived for a time, while the new gardens and grounds were being laid out and planted.

Redfern was well-born and well-educated. He had studied landscape gardening and land-surveying, and made a livelihood by them; often staying for months together at gentlemen's places on terms of equality with their families.

But in later life he had become a gardener by profession, after sustaining severe losses of various kinds and much hardship When his young wife, for whom he had worked hard, died, leaving him with one little girl under charge of her own faithful attendant, Redfern came home to live on his own small patrimony—the cottage on the moorland.

This was all that Ellen could tell her new friend—for in the course of those three short winter days and long evenings they had become friends—and it was enough. He was able to supplement the brief narrative.

He did not tell her more about herself and her parents than she already knew, but they talked together about Linntower.

He asked no embarrassing questions. There was evidently some mystery about the mother, who had died young, and whose death had completely broken her husband's spirit. Redfern had never been the same man afterwards. He never mentioned her name even to his daughter, and Aggy seldom spoke of her—never without tears.

It was a great pleasure to Ellen to speak unrestrainedly, for the first time, of the dead mother respecting whom she knew so little, when she found, or believed that she had found, a person worthy of trust, and whom it did not distress to name her.

She liked to hear the place described where her father had lived in

youth, and which bore the dates of old letters and of many of the gifts which now adorned her humble home. She fancied that it must have been her mother's birthplace. The family name of his lordship was the same as that borne by her own parent before her marriage. Probably she was one of the same kith and kin in some remote degree. The strong ideas of clanship nourished in Scotland made her understand this tie, which might be distinct, but in the North country was always respected. She was certainly of gentle birth, like her father, and had been delicately nurtured. Aggy always said that the pain of leaving Linntower and the travelling about had been too much for her young mistress. She was not well fitted to endure privation.

The cold blast of poverty swept over and blighted her like the spring flowers in the easterly wind, or the bright autumn leaves and lingering flowers,

> "When falls the frost from the clear, cold heaven,
> As falls the plague on men,
> And the beauty of their smile is gone
> From upland, glade, and glen."

Aggy shook her head as she watched from the window of her kitchen the departure of the dogcart; but Ellen stood, bareheaded, in the porch, with her eyes shaded by her hand from the sun, as the young Englishman waved his last good-bye.

Then she went back sadly into the sitting-room and put everything in order, replacing the books he had taken down from the case.

She missed, immediately, the little volume belonging to her mother, and sought for it vainly. It was nowhere to be found. Then she fancied that Aggy might have removed it, as she was always very particular about anything which had belonged to her former mistress.

Ellen was on her way to the kitchen to ask her, but she changed her mind and went back to the parlour. If Aggy had taken it out of the stranger's way, she would be sure to replace it—if not—Ellen paused, and stood leaning her head against the bookcase.

If not—*he* must have taken it—and she knew how severe would be Aggy's censure. She did not wish to hear him blamed, so, though days passed and the book was not put back in its place, Ellen said nothing about its disappearance to her mother's faithful servant.

The last traces of the snowstorm vanished from the braes and from the moor—only a wreath or two still hung above their purple sides on the highest peaks of the mountains.

IV.

LINNTOWER had been one of those old Border fortresses which can be turned into comfortable dwellings without destroying their picturesque antiquity. It stood, as its name denoted, by the side of a deep, dark pool, through which flowed a beck, or, as it would have been called on the Scottish side of the Cheviots, a burn. When flooded by autumn tempests it became a torrent and wrought much mischief.

The Squires of Linntower were said to be like their own quickly-swelling water-course. They were choleric men, and in their passion often harmed themselves and others.

The present owner of the Tower, though an old man, had not, even now, conquered his stormy temper; but of late it had sunk into querulousness. A long series of misfortunes had damped his furious passions, but they still smouldered, and if a spark were applied the flame kindled again.

There were dark tales told about Lord Linntower, and he was shunned by his neighbours. Even when a kindly visitor tried to cheer him, the attempt was churlishly repulsed. Many sorrows had fallen upon him; but they had neither chastened his spirits, nor softened his heart.

He was a childless man now, though he had been the father of three promising sons whom he had first estranged from him and finally lost. They all had the Lynn temper, it was true, but they were fine, bold youths; in them, at an early age it might have been corrected.

But theirs was a nature more easy to break than bend. Their father, from whom it was inherited, ruled them with a rod of iron. When they grew older, after divers escapades which were fiercely put down, he laid a yet heavier yoke on their necks; and they one and all defied him.

The eldest married in opposition to his will, emigrated, and died miserably of fever and ague in a swamp to which a deceitful announcement of the flourishing prospects of a rising colony had lured him. His young wife and child followed him to the grave.

The second son ran away from school, and, sooner than return home, went abroad and entered a foreign university, where he was killed in a students' brawl while chivalrously taking the part of a friend less strong and active than himself.

Thwarted in love, and sorely restricted in money matters, the third son fell into a bad circle of acquaintances, and died early, a victim to his own folly and his father's unrelenting severity.

One daughter had been given to him—but over her fate hung a veil of mystery. Her name had not been breathed at Linntower, except in a whisper, for years. It was said in the neighbourhood

that she had angered her father by an attachment to one who, though well-born and well-educated, was beneath her in station.

In one of his fits of ungovernable fury, the old man was said even to have raised his hand against her. There was a stain of ink on one of the family pictures in the library, which the housekeeper declared to be as indelible as the traditional bloodstains on the floor at Holyrood.

Lord Linntower always sat with his back turned to it, and yet, unseen, it bore witness against him that he had hurled the great glass ink-filled globe at the fragile girl who dared to stand up and not only refuse the brilliant match pressed upon her, but to own that she loved one whom her father regarded with scorn and stigmatised as a dependent.

That night Rosamond Lynn fled from her home. She never entered it again, and she was never forgiven or heard of again in the English border-land.

A faint rumour reached some of her early friends some years afterwards that she had died far from home, broken-hearted by her father's unkindness; totally disregarded by him, though more than once she had dutifully sued for pardon.

Now, though no one knew it, his conscience was more tender, especially when anything recalled her image. The old man would sit alone for hours, with his head resting on his hands, beside his desolate hearth, driving away all consolers by his harsh cynical bursts of ill-temper, and weep for his Rosa Mundi, as he used to call her when she was a little child——his Rose of the World!

In his earlier life he had had one soothing influence—a great love for flowers—but this too was turned to bitterness when the girl he loved better than anything else on earth deserted him, and married, in almost frantic fear and haste, the man who had helped him to lay out the gardens which were the boast of his vain heart.

Even his flowers seemed only to raise evil and covetous feelings from that day. He would have the best of every kind, and they must bloom for him alone. He would have liked to extirpate similar productions from his neighbours' borders. What were not used by the gardeners he sternly ordered to be burned or thrown away.

Redfern, he well knew, was a man descended from a good line of Scottish ancestors, and better educated than himself, but, if he ever spoke of him after discovering his daughter's infatuation, which was but seldom, he called him that gardener—that Scotch fellow that laid out the new pleasure grounds. No Percy was ever more hostile to the Douglas in the old Border raids in which his ancestors had gloried.

There was no question now of Border feuds or even of domestic estrangements. The old lord was his own chief tormentor, and the fire within him burned low. He had ceased to be a terror to his

ervants, as, for a time, in the bitterness of disappointments and olitude, he had been. He was even grateful for their respectful lemonstrations, thankful not to be left entirely alone.

Lord Linntower raised his bowed head when he heard, unexectedly, the sounds of an arrival in the courtyard below the windows f his library.

There had been a heavy fall of snow—then the beck had overowed its banks as usual; bridges were carried away, fields and roads vere inundated, several hundred acres of land hopelessly ruined. Not a soul had come to the house without bringing the news of some resh disaster. For the last three days he had, however, seen no one ut the household servants.

One visitor he had, who never flattered yet seldom irritated him. This was his young cousin, Jaspar Lynn, his heir presumptive, hough but distantly related to him. He was a fine frank youth, ond of sport, fond of company, high-spirited, like all the men of his ace, yet always ready to cheer and soothe his desponding relative, vhen permitted.

"Is that you, my boy?" said Lord Linntower, faintly, when the oor opened and the old butler announced "Mr. Jaspar," and stirred ie sluggish fire which his master had nearly allowed to die out.

"Sit down, and give an account of yourself. Not much to say bout the fishing in Scotland, I expect, in this fiendish weather?"

"No," said his young cousin, after they had shaken hands corially, his warm greeting bringing a faint tinge of colour to the ashen heeks and even a smile to the pale lips of his relative.

"The river was at first too low, and then frozen over. There as not a chance of sport. But I had a better reason for coming ack to England—in hurrying here without delay. I am the bearer o you of good tidings."

Lord Linntower raised himself up in his chair and looked sharply his cousin; then he laughed bitterly, and said:

"I do not well see how that can be—there are few things now at give me any pleasure—but stay—yes—I am glad to see you—I ink you have some kind feelings for me. I have outlived friendship most quarters. You have brought me *yourself*, Jaspar, and for that thank you."

There was a courtesy—when he did unbend, when he chose to be acious—in the old nobleman's manner which was very winning. spar acknowledged it by a glance of genuine affection.

"You have had snow here, and the breaking up of the frost has ade the beck overflow, but it can have been nothing to the white ass on the moor in which I was well-nigh buried," said Jaspar Lynn, mewhat embarrassed how to begin the tale he had to tell. He used, and then went on:

"You were very near losing your unworthy heir and representative st week, I assure you. If a girl and a brown retriever had not

pulled me from under a snowdrift where I had passed the night far from comfortably, you would now be the last of the Lynns of Linntower."

"Are you going to marry her? A woman is sure to be at the bottom of all mischief, whether it be a snowdrift or a quarrel," said the old man, smiling somewhat grimly; then added gently:

"Never mind, I have done with interfering. You can bring this fine-grown, bare-footed Hieland lassie to Linntower whenever you like. I shall make no moan about the mésalliance. You shall have your own way. You will have it, as I know to my misfortune."

"There is no question of love or marriage," said the young man, though he coloured suspiciously. "The question is not for, but against, my own interests. Do you remember telling me, when you were so ill last Christmas—when you thought that you were dying—that you had made me, unconditionally, your heir; but that you hoped I would do justice to the child of one whom you had injured, if I ever found that she had left any living offspring? It is in your power to amend that wrong yourself."

Linntower sprang up from his chair. "You have unearthed that miscreant, Redfern?" he exclaimed, the old fury blazing in his eyes. "That Highland reever who robbed me of my child! Where is he? Let me see him before I die!"

"No!" said Jaspar, gravely. "Alexander Redfern is beyond your reach. He and your poor daughter are in their graves. But they left a daughter, and I owe my life to her. I am, after her, your next of kin, and she cannot, as a woman, inherit your title or this old house and the estate attached to it; but you can leave the rest of your property to your grandchild—Ellen Redfern."

He took from the pocket of his vest the little book which he had brought away from the cottage on the moor, and put it into the old man's shaking hand.

Lord Linntower read the inscription on the fly-leaf through tears such as he had not shed for years. Before him, as he traced the faded characters, seemed to rise the slight form of the girl he had insulted in that very room.

"Tell her"—he said hoarsely—"Tell my poor Rosamond's daughter that before I see her here she must take the name of Lynn."

The snow had melted on the moor, and the cottage garden was gay with spring blossoms expanding in the April sunshine. Ellen Redfern and Aggy Mervyn were busy tending the borders, propping up plants broken by the storm wind, or weighed down by the snow.

Multitudes of primroses were studding the banks and braes; the cuckoo had been heard sending the news that spring was come through brake and thicket. The burn flowed merrily, singing as it went, past flowery nooks and grassy corners.

The girl's heart was not quite in tune with the prevailing note of adness. When Aggy went indoors to prepare the dinner, she left f work and stood leaning over the gate, looking towards the moun-ins, which were still crowned with snow.

Suddenly the silence which had followed the cuckoo's call was roken by the glad bark of a dog, and Hector sprang into sight from ehind a clump of alders.

Ellen shaded her eyes with her hand and looked across the moor; hen she saw, presently, emerge from the trees, the figures of a man nd a little dog advancing towards her. She opened the gate of ie cottage garden and went unhesitatingly to meet them.

Sunshine illuminated two happy faces and fell all around that appy group, as she and Jaspar Lynn clasped hands and turned ack together. He did not need her support now, but drew her and tenderly through his arm.

"Ellen," he said, gravely, "I have found out who your mother as, and that we are of kin to each other. I suspected it before, and ow your grandfather, Lord Linntower, knows of your existence and ngs to welcome you to his home. He has been sorely to blame—it he is old—I fear, dying. The excitement has been too great for m. You must come to him at once, and, as your father and other's representative, forgive all his hard-heartedness to them—his ng neglect of your claims on his affection. Can you do this?"

"Can I forgive a dying man?" exclaimed the girl, fervently. "My wn dear mother's father! How else could I ever hope for forgive-ess myself? Take me to him at once."

"But there is one condition, dearest," said Jaspar, tenderly. Before he receives you as his child, his heiress, you must resign our father's name. Lord Linntower wishes to take you to his heart ; his own grandchild—and you must bear the old name—the name of ynn. Ellen, I have thought of a way; I have so arranged—if ou will consent to my wish—that this may be no reproach to our honoured parent's memory. You must enter his presence as y wife. Then you will indeed be Ellen Lynn!"

The girl's head drooped, but she did not draw herself away from m. Her mission was found, and she undertook it cheerfully.

Ellen stooped kindly to pick up the little dog, which was pulling her skirt, tired with his long walk across the moor. Hector had in on in front and was standing in the porch, with Aggy patting his ead, while she looked anxiously at her young mistress.

Though the old nobleman did not die then, or for many a year, here was peace in the dwelling of the Lynns of Linntower from he day when Jaspar brought his bonnie bride across the border.

NOTES OF A DISTRICT VISITOR.

SPEAKING of the advantages of living in London, Boswell instances the freedom from remark and petty censure which is there attainable, and which to those who know the teasing restraints of a narrow circle must appear so desirable. Mr. Burke, whose life was such as to make the eye of observation less to be dreaded of him than of most men, once pleasantly remarked, that though he had the honour to represent Bristol, he would not like to live there. "I should be obliged to be so much upon my good behaviour," he said.

Especially is this true with regard to the poor, as for convenience we will call them.

Living so much at their doors, as they do, not the doings of our most public characters are more open to inspection; and many a peccadillo which the perpetrator may fondly deem concealed in the recesses of his own domicile is proclaimed, if not on the house-tops, at the street corners. Their black sheep are very soon spotted out. To this fact is due, in a great measure, the frequent flittings that take place amongst them, fresh surroundings becoming desirable when the old have grown too hot. "If I so much as sing, the neighbours say I've taken too much," complained an aggrieved housewife, "and I only take a glass of beer with my husband at supper—and such I shall *hever* do," she added, with an air of the utmost determination.

Sobriety may almost be said to be with them the test of worth.

A man may have the worst of tempers, and be addicted to striking his wife and children; yet, provided he be not wanting in steadiness, the neighbours, if not the wife herself, will speak of him with a certain respect, as "a good, sober man." Another may be the tenderest of husbands and fathers, yet meet with scant appreciation if he fail in that essential virtue of a bread-winner.

For this is what the husband in these ranks most emphatically may be styled. And it is partly on this account that his health and comfort is made a subject of particular consideration, the same principle ruling here as that which induces the Russian peasant priest to cherish his better-half, on whose life his tenure of office depends. "My word, I've *got* to be careful! We couldn't spare him yet, with the children so young, and all," was the unexpected response of a wife on being commended for the admirable devotion with which she had nursed her good man through a trying illness.

This matter-of-fact view of things is very characteristic of the poor. A young woman having come from a distance to visit her dying brother, his wife half-grudgingly remarked that it was "another mouth

for her to feed." And who could blame her, when the filling of each mouth in the poverty-stricken household was a matter involving hard labour and anxious thought?

Another woman, an affectionate wife in her way, would throw cold water on her visitor's sensibilities by her practical manner of adverting to the chance of her husband's decease and to her own contingent resources, her formula for the contemplated event being the same as that adopted in higher circles. "If anything happens to Smithers," she would say, with an air of resignation it might have depressed the honest fellow to perceive, "I'll go into service as a cook." It is in blunter terms that some of them will refer to a like possibility. A childless woman, expressing a regret that she had not at least a little girl, remarked that the child would have been company for her "when the master was snapped away;" the probability of her being the first to go apparently not having occurred to her.

The poor are almost invariably pessimists where sickness is concerned. A fatal conclusion is at once leaped at, and the atmosphere of the churchyard allowed to penetrate into the sick-chamber. As soon as graver symptoms show themselves, the patient is pronounced to be "dying." The change of medicine prescribed by the doctor in charge is descanted on with ominous solemnity, and the bottle handed about to be sniffed at by the attendant company.

They seldom have any fear of death, committing themselves trustfully to the arms of Divine mercy when life appears to be slipping from them. And there is something almost ludicrous, for all its pathos, in the way they lay claim, for themselves and their departed friends, to whatever joys may be reserved for the people of God. Thoroughly penetrated with the spirit of the "Old Hundredth," they assume themselves to be all His people and the sheep of His hand, seeing it is He that hath made us and not we ourselves.

Some of their spiritual directors do not scruple, even at a death-bed, to disturb this feeling of confidence, which they term self-righteousness. We have heard a pious lady relate, with much gusto, how she terrified an old woman, said to be dying, by telling her at the close of a short interview, "Well, granny, you're going to ——" (mentioning a place which in our revised Bible is designated as Sheol), leaving the helpless old creature trembling so violently that the bed shook beneath her. Her only grounds for this conclusion were that "granny" seemed to be deriving some comfort from the acknowledged fact, to which all her neighbours testified, that she had been "a good liver," as they phrase it, and had honestly fulfilled her duties as wife and mother.

Their generally childlike faith in things unseen is indeed one of the few compensations of the poor for their lack of worldly prosperity, enabling them to bear the greatest sufferings with fortitude.

They will speak as familiarly, for the most part, of their Heavenly as of their earthly father, and with the same simplicity of affection.

Touching is the freedom with which the very shabbiest old crone, who would consider herself as beneath the notice of her fellow-mortals, will refer to the Deity. "He does the best He can for us!" one such aged creature, infirm with rheumatism and beset by the most sordid cares of poverty, declared, with an affecting, because so genuine, expression of confidence in at least the goodwill of her Maker. While another, who had just sustained the greatest loss with which a poor woman can be afflicted, in the death of her husband, broke forth, as she wiped the tears from her faded blue eyes—"His will must be done—and He's welcome! I'm sure He's welcome!"—as if with a misgiving lest the involuntary display of her grief might have wounded the feelings of the Almighty.

A younger woman, commenting on a series of calamities in the shape of illness, poverty and accidents, which, for some years past, had persistently distressed the community, burst out with the half expostulatory, half deprecating reflection, "We must be very bad for Him to treat us like this"—as if, while wondering at His judgments, she was yet unwilling to cast the shadow of an aspersion on His justice.

The ignorance of many concerning the Bible is astonishing. Not only do its most important stories come as a perfect surprise upon them, but, their spiritual faculties being dormant, its symbolism presents often nothing but material images of terror to their minds. A young woman, after listening with rapt attention to a chapter from the book of Revelation, horrified her teacher by declaring that she would not like to go to Heaven, and, being pressed for a reason, "Because of them beasts," was her startling reply.

Some appear to consider all the events recorded in Holy Writ as having taken place in a different sphere. The earthly Jerusalem is inevitably mixed up in their ideas with its heavenly prototype. Palestine is confounded with Paradise, and whatever localities they may remember as mentioned in the Scriptures, are, in their ideas, quite without the pale of mundane geography. A woman, on hearing that a gentleman she knew of had started for Egypt, exclaimed in the utmost bewilderment, "I thought Egypt was in the other world!"

The women are too much engrossed, as a rule, with household cares to give much heed to literature, as such; yet their thoughts occasionally stray in its direction. The latent impulse in them is likely to be excited by those narrative tracts bearing on their own manner of life, concerning which they know so much more themselves than any outsider can possibly do, that, in the moment of reading, it seems to them as if it might be an easy thing to present their experiences in like form.

"I often think I should like to write something," said one poor woman; "and there's only *one* thing that stops me—and that is want of time," she added, hastily, as if in fear we might misapprehend her

meaning. On a question as to what her theme would be, "I should write something about real life, such as, On the Trials of a Mother," she answered, gazing dreamily out into the little street where her two young hopefuls were rolling together in the mud. And, with a sigh over her wasted abilities, she resumed her ironing.

Their romantic tendency is sometimes shown in the names they give their children, though the good old nomenclature is followed in the main. But with the sturdy dame in Crabbe's "Parish Register," whose pride took fire at the mildly-spoken query, "Why Lonicera wilt thou name thy child?" they might reply, "We have a right."

A woman was much hurt at the vicar stumbling over the string of names she had chosen to bestow on her latest born, and which bore all the impress of having been invented for the occasion. On our asking the name of a little snub-nosed, sandy-haired maiden in her mother's arms, "Ady," was the complacent answer. Ada being a favourite appellation in our parish, we took for granted this was meant; but our supposition had fallen a flight below the mark. "I said *Ady*—not Ada. Have you ever read Don Jooan? It was her father chose the name." And she admiringly regarded the unconscious little namesake of the beauteous Haidée. Byron, we may remark, whatever his present standing in the world of criticism may be, certainly holds his own amongst the working classes. His name, and never without the lordly prefix, is the first that rises to their lips in connection with poetry; and we have seen "Don Juan," in particular, on the table of more than one cottage parlour.

No small amount of artistic taste and talent exists amongst the poor. Anything that appeals to their instinctive love of beauty, a bunch of flowers, a strain of music however simple, a beautiful sunset, a rainbow, will divert them from their monotonous cares; and many women, especially those who have no children to monopolise their attention, will cherish a window-plant as if it were a thing of life.

There is a growing desire that at least the rising generation should acquire some practical acquaintance with drawing and music. Concertinas and other small instruments are frequently to be found in cottage homes; and a piano, going off at a bargain, is in great request. Little fingers born to labour are often very much at home upon the keyboard; and even those already hardened by years of toil will turn, when opportunity offers, to the ivory notes, the sounds evoked, however elementary, apparently responding to some craving in their nature. We have known a young policeman spend most of his leisure time in this manner, trying, though sorely hampered by the size of his fingers, to awaken echoes of music-hall and other popular strains on his landlady's old piano, and gratefully availing himself of the slightest hint toward the attainment of his ambition.

The notion prevails to a certain extent amongst the men that to do anything in the way of housework would be derogatory to their

dignity, even though they may have been trained to it in early life by their mothers.

"I didn't sign articles to wait upon my wife when I married," proclaimed a strapping boatman; the fragile little skeleton of a woman who stood in that relation to him being far on in consumption. In accordance with these heroic sentiments, he would not so much as pour himself out a cup of tea when the weary housekeeper, having left everything prepared and ready to his hand, had toiled upstairs, perhaps, to attend on a sick child. A magnanimous ignorance on domestic affairs is occasionally affected by heroes of this ilk; another of whom, with an air of proud complacency, remarked in our hearing, probably with a view of awaking our admiration, that he could no more infuse tea than he could infuse himself.

Sometimes it is really the ability that is wanting and not the will. "I've done the best I could, but I'm only a man," said one, who, during the absence of his women-folk, was obliged to get tea ready for some unexpected visitors, and light a fire in the parlour.

There is nothing, on the other hand, that some are incapable of accomplishing, from taking womanly charge of their children, left motherless, to mending or making furniture, and renovating a dilapidated house from top to bottom. Veritable Robinson Crusoes in their way, with perhaps more than the stimulus of living on a desert island to inspire them.

It is, with all its anxieties, a happy-go-lucky sort of existence that the majority of these poor people lead, living for the most part up to their income, which is often larger than that of many a professional man.

"My chap gets more than that!" one slatternly woman half contemptuously remarked, referring to her vicar's stipend; "a good bit more," she added, after a moment's silent consideration of the subject. Being put to comparatively slight outlay in a number of ways which bear heavily on the class above them, they can devote their earnings chiefly to the inner man; and it is only in cases of dire poverty that any stint in food or fuel will be submitted to. Not a few of them, indeed, would invest their last shilling on a meal, trusting to Providence for the next; though the unpretending fortitude and patience with which they accommodate themselves to radically altered circumstances is very touching.

Most of them will endure the extremest privations rather than resort to their last refuge, the workhouse, or the "House," as with bated breath they call it. Even when every avenue of hope seems to be closed, and the last resources are at an end, they will put off the evil hour from day to day, waiting, like Micawber, though with nothing of his easy insouciance, for something to turn up.

We have known old women to pass backwards and forwards between that dread abode and their own miserable quarters, to which they would return again and again, with the renewed hope of bein

able to fight the battle of life in their own free if wretched makeshift way, to be driven back beaten to the great unhomely shelter whose doors are always open to such as them.

One such aged creature, "far on in her eighties," as the neighbours averred, and whose home was made unbearable to her by her daughter's drunken habits, pursued these forlorn tactics for years, finding it hard to decide betwixt her choice of evils which was worst. When things became too bad at home, she would screw up her courage to enter the House, returning very soon, however, and with ghastly tales of the treatment to which she and the other "pore old ladies" (her room-mates) had been subjected. One of these she solemnly declared to have died, owing to the roughness of a nurse; and, while her colour rose, as if at the recollection of things too horrible to mention—"Oh, they use you shameful, my dear!" was the phrase her pent-up misery found vent in. Then, cooling down, she would descant on the wretched victuals served out, and of which she could barely bring herself to swallow "a mossel," while the "tay-watter," when they got it, was fit to make one "heave one's heart up."

Many of the women are as dependent on their medical man as the finest delicate lady in Mayfair. But hospital treatment is regarded with distrust, the fancy prevailing, as an old woman rather aptly phrased it, that the young doctors are given to trying their "experiences" on patients. Mrs. Malaprop may be dying out in the middle classes, but she is rampant in these. We have heard of a woman who announced that she had been "insulting her physician, and he had given her a subscription and said she had a festival in her inside." Whatever the festival may have been, she evidently thought it conferred some sort of subtle distinction upon her.

An Englishman's house is said to be his castle, but it is less so in the poor man's case. What with the School Board, the Board of Health officers, district visitors of the more intrusive kind, and others, our labouring classes certainly have a taste of paternal government.

In times of infectious illness they are especially subject to supervision, the most stringent obligations being insisted on with regard to them. To evade these they not infrequently attempt to disguise the fact of such illness having broken out in their homes.

Grievous mistakes, however, are occasionally made upon the other side. A woman of our acquaintance, who, during a slight epidemic of small-pox, was supposed to have shown symptoms of the malady, was called for one night by emissaries from the hospital, and would have been straightway carried thither *nolens volens* in a conveyance brought for the purpose. But she proved equal to the emergency. Barricading the door with the assistance of her aged mother, the only person with her in the house (her husband being at sea), she courageously kept the foe at bay, and the hospital was disappointed of its intended patient. Following up her victory, early next morning she went to a well-known doctor in the town, and obtained from

him a certificate to the effect that she was suffering from nothing more serious than a feverish cold.

The working-classes being untrammelled by any regular code of etiquette, a peculiarly ingenuous display of natural quality may consequently be looked for amongst them, and visiting in their midst affords the student of character wide scope for the indulgence of his hobby.

One man, out of his natural courtesy, will offer his visitor the best chair in the room. Another may think it more consistent with his dignity, as master of the house, to reserve the post of honour for himself. But it is with the woman-kind that the visitor has most to do. Some guard their thresholds as jealously as if they fancied one to be of the nature of an evil spirit, whose entrance might bring ill-luck upon the dwelling.

A woman who had taken many months to make up her mind to the venture admitted us one afternoon into the sanctity of her parlour with the courteously-intended word of welcome as she handed us a chair—"This is the first time as hever you've 'ad the pleasure of sitting down in my 'ouse."

Some, in the spirit of the wandering Arab, will not be satisfied until the visitor has eaten of their bread, while there are others who apparently deem it beneath either their own dignity, or yours, to take the possibility of such a thing into consideration. "Me and this other lady is having a cup of afternoon tea," an old friend of ours would pleasantly remark if ever we chanced to come upon her during the entertainment; the thought of inviting us to share in it being the last that would have suggested itself to her mind.

There is one class of people that is very seldom met with amongst the poor in their own abodes. There are the aged grand-parents, the parents themselves, the exhaustless relays of little ones, the numerous married aunts and uncles, cousins, and other relatives; and amongst all these we have come across but one old maid.

A gentle, prim little soul she was, and kept house for a hard-working charwoman, whose sons and herself were out working most of the day. She attributed her condition of single blessedness to her own shyness, declaring that she might have married "many a time." According to the tradition of her order, she cherished the portrait of the lover of her youth, who had gone down with his ship to the bottom of the sea some forty years ago; for this was an old maid indeed. Women of these ranks are often as little inclined as their richer sisters to forego the prestige of their youth, and marriages amongst them at an advanced age are by no means infrequent. These usually take place from houses where they have lived in service, the elderly couple settling down as unobtrusively as possible to their untried life.

Good and kind to his family as the working-man generally appears, he is most emphatically master in his own house, and few are the

wives who venture to dispute the supremacy. Should they do so, an encounter is apt to ensue, from which the man, however, occasionally comes off second best. "Me and my 'usband was 'aving some words," was the polite formula with which one sturdy virago would allude to these little altercations, the words in this case being staves, or, to be more liberal, the staircase banisters, which, from the ever-renewed demand upon them, rapidly disappeared till there was scarcely one left.

Nothing are the women more ashamed of than a black eye, inventing the most elaborate excuses to account for one. A friend of ours who had struck against a door on a dark night, and whose face bore evident trace of the accident, was regarded with an air of much commiseration by a woman in her district. Utterly ignoring her visitor's explanation of the matter, "I can't think," burst forth the sympathetic soul, "how some people can bear to be knocked about. If my husband was to give me so much as a cross look it would kill me."

Some of the less high-minded among them enjoy being asked, with more or less circumlocution, according to one's own sense of delicacy, how "the master" is behaving himself. "I'm sorry to say he's only *very, very* middling," is a common form for the expression of their opinion concerning him.

Children are objects of love and praise in cottage homes, as they are everywhere else; but they often have to suffer from their parents' ignorance. Spinal complaint is sometimes induced by the way in which, from the age of a few weeks, they are held in an upright position.

Many seem to consider their little ones impervious to cold, standing with them at their street doors in the bleakest winter wind. We have seen this done in the case of a child ill with whooping-cough or influenza, its little eyes inflamed and watery, and its face blue from the exposure. On our expressing compassion for a baby whose tiny arm was sore and raw from vaccination, the youthful mother informed us with an air of authority that so young an infant could not feel pain. "They are little angels," she placidly explained; "they cannot suffer, they are too innocent." And several neighbours present corroborated the notion. At what age the curse of suffering humanity may begin to be felt is probably a doubtful matter.

A more dangerous opinion is that young infants require no air. They will often be tightly wrapped in shawls, with not a loop-hole left to breathe through. On our remonstrance, a woman drew down the heavy covering from her sleeping baby, revealing a little face of death-like hue.

Perhaps no less injurious in its general effect is the habit of incessant, violent rocking of the cradle which almost universally prevails. If the mother is busy, an elder child, perhaps barely out of the cradle itself, will be set to the task. The louder baby screams, the rougher becomes the rocking, till, dizzied perhaps by the un

ceasing motion, the helpless little creature holds its peace. And the wisest in other respects are as great offenders in this as any.

The grades of social distinction are by no means ignored amongst the working classes. "Two-pence-halfpenny looks down on two-pence," as a Devonshire woman neatly phrased it, she herself as keeper of a small grocer's shop being above such petty differences.

The policeman and his family occupy an assured position, safe from the down-hills of fortune as represented in the loss of work. Yet it is a delicate and ticklish one; and if he resides in a rowdy neighbourhood he is apt to make enemies, his consort sharing in the obloquy cast upon him. One woman, a model of respectability and virtue, was much hurt by a neighbour who, in retaliation of some interference she had met with from the representative of order, called out in shrill, offensive tones that all might hear—"*Hark* to the common policeman!"

The distinctions we speak of are, however, very superficial, a strong bond of brotherhood existing amongst the people. It frequently happens, moreover, that a skilled artisan will be obliged, when work in his own line is unobtainable, to "go labouring."

There is a growing tendency amongst working people to assume an equality with the classes they used to consider as on a perfectly different level from their own. The younger generation have acquired an independence of bearing not often found amongst their elders. "I can't get them to say ma'am," the toil-worn mothers will protest, with a touch of admiring envy in their reproof. And a woman, excusing her husband who had lost his situation through some dispute with his employers, remarked, "He can't be going about *sirring*." The American tone of equality is certainly developing, and there will probably be less class difference in the next generation than there is now.

The life of toil and suffering develops many noble traits.

Sympathy, generosity and unselfish consideration are rife amongst the poor. It is to such as are but little better off than themselves that those in want will turn, and seldom in vain. Women will give up their most valued possessions to be pawned by an acquaintance in difficulties. We have known one devote her husband's silver medal to that purpose, and another her son's best coat. And many will forego just claims upon a struggling family. Men engaged at the same works will get up collections amongst themselves to relieve the necessities of a mate. And few are the women who would refuse to rise at any hour of the night at the call of illness in a neighbour's house.

The word neighbour has indeed a closer signification in these ranks than perhaps in any other. It is a common thing for those who live next door to each other to summon assistance in an emergency by rapping against the wall of partition between their several houses.

Their sense of justice, too, is almost always to be relied on. The failings of one member of a family do not usually entail reproach on the rest; and whenever a notoriously bad character turns over a new leaf, those residing near will begin to speak of him or her as a "good, quiet neighbour," against whom they have nothing to say.

The purlieus of the poor are more frequented than richer neighbourhoods by beggars, street-singers, and itinerant musicians and vendors, who have no doubt learned by experience that it is from those out of whose ranks they have probably fallen that they are most likely to meet with consideration, if not help. One is reminded of the fashion in such matters said to prevail in Spain by the manner in which charity is tendered or else refused these suppliants. "I have nothing for you to-day, master." Or—"If you will accept a little bread-and-butter, you are welcome to it." Rarely are child-mendicants sent empty away, some kind-hearted woman being sure to reflect on what her feelings would be should her own little ones be compelled to go a-begging for a bit of bread.

When we recall the pleasant hours we have spent amongst the poor, the genuine goodness of so many of them, their courteous hospitality, their gentle care and training of the little ones, their noble reticence with regard to their own difficulties and trials, their peaceful faith and trust flowing undisturbed in quiet havens of their own, while the wild seas of doubt and speculation sweep unnoticed by; when we recall this, and their unobtrusive kindness, their touching gratitude for the slightest kindness shown to them, we feel that it is an impertinence to speak of them as if they were in any way beneath us.

P. W. Roose.

GRANDMOTHER'S CLOTHES' BASKET.

THERE had been terrible battles, and Winifred would not give in; so grandmother, who was guardian to the refractory girl, ordered her to her room until a proper state of mind was reached. Now Winnie and I were cousins and both of us orphans; and grandmother was of the old school, hard and tyrannical. She wanted Winnie to marry an elderly man who had gout, a detestable temper and a huge rent-roll. But sweet, bright Winnie! since she was a child she had loved Ronald Leigh, and now he was first lieutenant in the Navy, and had asked her for his wife.

"Presumptuous folly!" cried our sage grandmother; "the child shall not throw herself away." And so bolts and bars were set to keep love out, but when did that avail?

Winnie had been a prisoner for a week, shut in her room; and at the first her eyes were heavy with tears. But on Saturday—I remember it was just after the laundress's large covered basket of clothes was carried upstairs—she was flushed and smiling. I thought it strange when I conveyed my grandmother's nightly message, "Are you prepared to submit?" which I had hard work at all times to deliver formally for laughter, to find the captive looking so like her old, bright self, but she only kissed me, and whispered back her usual answer of "No!" in a rather more defiant tone than usual.

All the next day, Sunday, was gloomy and dull. The stately meals with my grandmother were rendered more trying than ordinary by the absence of that bright-faced cousin, whose merry blue eyes had lightened up the sober room with many a furtive gleam of fun. On Monday I was sent up to my usual duty of watching the counting of the linen for the wash. I wrote the list while Joan, the old housemaid, separated and called out the number of the things. The linen room opened out of Winnie's, and as I passed back to go downstairs, I paused to throw my arm round the dear neck with a whispered question.

"Have you any comfort, Winnie, darling?"

"Stay a minute, Gladys," she answered hurriedly—and old Joan drew near anxiously. "Joan knows," she went on. "I mustn't tell *you*, Gladys, for your own sake, but all will be right by to-morrow."

She spoke as if she meant it. Just then grandmother called me, and, much puzzled, I ran down. It was to accompany her in a long, tedious stroll round the square.

I was not allowed to go up to Winnie again, and in the evening we sat down to our solitary dinner. While eating the soup, wheels were heard to dash up and stop at the door, and the bell rang loudly.

"What is that, Judkins?" inquired grandmother, turning her stern face on the butler.

"Laundress, I think, my lady; 'twas the area bell," answered the old man; and after having put the fish on the table, he vanished from the room.

Grandmother did not help the fish; she never seemed to see the fine turbot that lay so temptingly on the dish. With a nervous manner, not usual, she rose from her chair, walked to the window, and peered out. Instinctively I followed her and coincided in her verdict as she dropped the blind and shut out the lamp-lit square.

"Only the laundress."

I wondered what else she could have thought. And where was Judkins? Heavy steps sounded on the stairs, and grandmother opened the dining-room door just as the big square basket was being carried down to the hall by Judkins and Joan. Sharply the old lady's voice rose.

"What do you mean by this, Judkins? Why do you leave the dining-room? The maids could have carried that down!"

"Seems 'eavier than usual, my lady," said Judkins imperturbably.

"That it do!" cried Joan gaspingly; "two men wouldn't be too much for it!"

And out to the cart went the basket through the hall-door as being the readiest way. The door shut with a snap, and Judkins came in rubbing his hands and smiling. The solemn, decorous Judkins!

And we heard the cart dash and clatter away.

Grandmother never looked at Judkins; she was too angry. She helped me to cold fish, and then herself; and so on over the remainder of that wearisome dinner; it seemed to be longer than ever. At last I ventured to look round at the clock—it was nine, and we had sat down at half-past six!—that was a very late hour for dinner when I was a girl, my dear.

"Go up once more to your cousin, Gladys, and ask if she is prepared to submit."

Solemnly I rose from my chair, left the room, and closed the door after me. At the back of the hall stood Judkins and Joan, whispering with some of the other servants. I thought it strange, but they all dispersed as my white dress emerged from the dining-room. I walked slowly up the stairs until I came to the little chamber where the prisoner was kept locked up, and at it I knocked. No answer; so I turned the key, which was in the door, and went in. The room was in hopeless confusion, and no Winifred Lacy was there! Tremblingly I looked around at the scattered ornaments and ribbons, torn letters, and other *débris* of hasty departure, and when old Joan entered behind me, I threw myself into her arms and cried aloud with terror.

"Joan, Joan, where is she? What is it all? Oh, my darling Winnie!"

The old woman soothed me like a child, and whispered:

"All is well with her, dear missy—only nobody must say much."

"Has she gone away, Joan? Who let her out?—and how shall I tell grandmother?"

There was no need. Grandmother, white and stern, stood at the door. It was well for me that I had no hand in the escape.

Next day a letter came to say Winnie was Ronald Leigh's wife. Grandmother wished she had shut up *both*.

And long after—when I was a wife and mother myself, and had inherited all my grandmother's wealth, left to me in her indignation—I was told that Ronald was the man who drove the laundress's cart that night, and that he had carried off his beautiful bride in "Grandmother's Clothes' Basket!"

MINNIE DOUGLAS.

SONNET.

BELIEVE it not: life is not storm, but peace,
The peace that comes when storms have died away;
The calm that crowns some fiery battle day
By Persian fought on plains of ancient Greece,
When vanquished sink in death, and conquerors cease
From weariness to strike; and closes night
O'er both her dark and drowsy wing—Life's might
Our conquered passions prove; our soul's release
From shameful bonds. Say we live when, serene
We stand upon this sad life's second shore,
Our youth behind; the flood of time between
Two lives—then smile at griefs whose sting is o'er,
At joys that can delude the heart no more,
And thoughtful dream of passions that have been.

JULIA KAVANAGH.

A SHY AUSTRALIAN.

By Virginia Taylour.

MRS. OSBORNE, of Balmoral House, Anerley, was giving a dance.

Balmoral House, being a jerry-built suburban villa of the kind advertised by house-agents as "A desirable residence, with two reception-rooms, six bed-rooms and a bath-room," was not eminently adapted for that form of entertainment. But Mrs. Osborne was a woman of determination and resources, and her annual dance was usually, and with reason, considered by all concerned a very successful enterprise. She generally managed to have, not only enough of the male sex, but a good proportion of presentable, full-grown specimens.

To-night, she had achieved an additional triumph. She had secured the presence of her cousin, Viscountess Langholme.

Lady Langholme was a widow with five portionless daughters, for whom it was her main object in life to procure husbands. She went to work in a very business-like manner. She was never seen, even in her own house, with more than two, and rarely with more than one of her girls; and she had a marvellous knack of disposing of them singly during the country-house visiting season with friends who lived far apart and had different circles of acquaintance. But in vain. Frances the eldest was four-and-twenty, and Ada, the youngest, was nineteen, and not one of them had ever had a proposal. The case was becoming so desperate that Lady Langholme had thought even the opportunities offered by a suburban ball might be worth trying for Frances, who could not reasonably be expected to retain her looks much longer, and who must therefore be content with something less than might still be hoped for Ada, who had only had one season, or Nellie, who was a beauty; or, even the twins, who were popular with everybody.

Therefore, here was Lady Langholme, sitting with maternal heroism in a draughty passage, which was the only place afforded by the suburban villa for chaperons, while Mrs. Osborne brought up her "nicest men," one after another, to be introduced to Frances.

Frances Scott was a tall, slender, graceful girl, with grey eyes, a clear, pale skin, soft dark hair, and a touch of proud reserve in her manner, which some people called "high-bred repose," and others, "odious airs." Mrs. Osborne's "nicest men" inclined to the latter opinion, but the few raw youths whom the hostess was obliged to fall back upon to fill up Frances's programme hardly realised the existence of any reserve in her manner.

"I'm quite glad we came," said Lady Langholme, when her daughter was beside her for a few minutes. "It is all very nice and very amusing."

"I am very glad we came," returned Frances, "for Cousin Laura's sake. It is disgraceful that we should never have had the civility to come before."

"Not dancing, Frances, dear," exclaimed Cousin Laura, coming up at this moment. "Isn't your card full?"

"It is quite full enough," answered Frances brightly. "I can assure you I'm not accustomed to have a partner for every dance."

"Oh, but, my dear, you must. Let me see." Mrs. Osborne stood reflecting, with rather a distressed look. "There's that young Mr. Fanshawe. He's an Australian squatter or something; and rich, I believe," she added in an undertone to Lady Langholme.

But Frances caught the words, and her features immediately stiffened.

"Introduce him to us, at any rate," replied Lady Langholme, "and then we can judge for ourselves."

Mrs. Osborne went away and returned in a few minutes with a tall, handsome, athletic-looking young man, with bright, keen blue eyes, a fair beard, and a sunburnt skin.

The introduction was made, the hostess moved away, and Mr. Fanshawe, leaning easily against the doorway of the ball-room, remarked:

"I haven't spoken to a woman for seven years, so I'm rather shy."

"It's as well you inform us of the fact, as we certainly should not have guessed it," replied Lady Langholme.

Frances drew up her head and appeared to be intent on watching the dancers.

"No," returned Mr. Fanshawe, "because you have never seen shyness before as exhibited by a savage."

Lady Langholme laughed, and for a few minutes conversation between the pair flowed brightly. From time to time the young man glanced at Frances's abstracted face, but he made no effort to address her.

"You don't dance, I suppose?" said Lady Langholme, reading these glances with maternal quickness.

"I am sorry to say it is an art I have quite forgotten."

Mr. Osborne approached at this point to take Lady Langholme in to supper. Mr. Fanshawe then offered to conduct the young lady to the supper-room.

"No, thank you," she replied. "I am going to dance immediately."

"But you need not fulfil supper dance engagements if you are hungry."

"Perhaps not in the bush," she retorted, and then checked her-

self, vexed at betraying that she had been listening to his conversation with her mother.

He did not apparently notice either betrayal or vexation. Nor did he urge his previous request. He quietly took Lady Langholme's vacated chair, and fell to talking of books, and music, and pictures as easily as if he had lived all his life in London; but there was a spontaneity and simplicity in all his remarks that differed widely from the conventional superficial art criticism to which Frances was accustomed. She left him, however, with alacrity when her next partner, a most unprepossessing-looking youth of about twenty, came to claim her.

As Lady Langholme and her daughter were leaving that night, Mr. Fanshawe was standing in the hall. The elder lady held out her hand to him.

"Good-night, Mr. Fanshawe. Mind you come and see me."

But Frances gave him only a cold little bow as she passed out.

"Charming person, Lady Langholme," observed Mrs. Osborne to the young man.

"Yes," he replied, "Lady Langholme *is* charming, but the daughter is either very stupid or very stuck up."

"She is not really either," said Mrs. Osborne, "but she has a difficult life with her —" She stopped on the verge of a possibly indiscreet remark, and moved away.

Lady Langholme, in the meantime, was discoursing to her daughter on the agreeable surprise she had experienced at finding that suburban balls were, but for a few minor details, very like the balls of her own set.

"And as for Mr. Fanshawe," concluded her ladyship, "*he* is delightful; so clever and original."

"He struck me as being very self-sufficient," returned Frances; and then she resolutely composed herself for sleep.

But when the carriage drew up at their house in Lower Berkeley Street, Frances had not slept, and whatever she may have done during the night, she rang her bell at eight o'clock the next morning to intimate that she did not desire to lie in bed later than usual.

Her bell was answered by her four sisters coming in in their dressing-gowns, all eager to know the result of the novel and interesting experiment that had been tried the previous night.

"Now tell us all about it," began Nellie, sitting down on the bed, while the twins leant over the foot-rail, and Ada found herself a chair. "We did pity you last night. Were you dreadfully bored?"

"Not more so than usual," replied Frances calmly.

"And did you dance much? And could they dance?" inquired Ada.

"I danced a good deal more than I am in the habit of doing—I was made a great deal of, my dears. And they could dance, taking

them all round, as well as most of the men we are accustomed to dance with."

"And mother," asked one of the twins—"is she horribly disgusted? Or does she think it was worth while?"

"Oh, Dolly, dear," sighed Frances, "I'm sorry to say she does think it was worth while."

"Oh, tell us about it," cried the whole four at once. "Who is it? What sort of man?"

"Well," Frances paused, and turned her face so that it was half buried in the pillow, "he seemed rather a nice sort of man. But of course mother rushed at him, so I was obliged to snub his nose off."

"Frances is blushing," observed Ada. "Oh, dear! What a pity."

And the other three echoed "What a pity!"

Then Nellie went on imploringly, "Oh, Frances! *Don't*, *don't* be foolish."

"What nonsense you are all talking," cried Frances. "I am going to get up and dress, and you had all better go and dress too."

"But do tell us some more about him," urged Nellie. "Who is he? What is he like? Of course he is eligible, or mother would not have rushed at him."

"There is nothing to tell you," answered Frances impatiently. "He is an Australian who gives himself airs. Mother has asked him here, so then, Nellie, you can marry him. Now please go, all of you."

She jumped out of bed as she spoke, and her sisters reluctantly retired, only, however, to congregate in the twins' room and re-discuss the unusual circumstance of Frances's blushing over one of their mother's eligible young men.

"If Frances likes him he must be nice," they sighed; "and the more she likes him, the more she will snub him, if mother persists in throwing her at his head."

About a week after Mrs. Osborne's dance, Lady Langholme and her eldest daughter on their return from a drive found Mr. Fanshawe's card on the hall-table.

"I am sorry we have missed him," observed Lady Langholme. "I suppose now we must ask him to dinner."

"I don't see the necessity," said Frances.

"Come into my sitting-room for a moment," her mother went on, heedless of this remark; "I will see what days we have free."

Frances obeyed, and stood by the writing-table with an air of serene indifference while her mother looked over her list of engagements.

"Tuesday week will do," Lady Langholme said at last. "We will have a party of eight, and you had better dine—as you know him."

"It's the twins' turn," objected Frances.

"It won't do to have three of ourselves out of eight," returned her mother.

"Then Ada's turn is next."

"Don't be so tiresome, Frances. I wish you to dine."

Frances said no more. Mr. Fanshawe accepted the invitation, and arrived on Tuesday evening exactly as the clock struck eight.

In spite of Frances's previous protests, he was told off to take her down to dinner. As they passed a curtained recess on the landing, Frances was made aware, by a twitch at her dress, that her sisters were concealed there for the purpose of taking a survey of the shy Australian. The circumstance did not incline her to relax the stiffness of her manner to the young man.

He, however, seemed quite unconscious of her coolness.

"I'm awfully glad to have the opportunity of seeing a little of the best London society," he observed, looking round the table. "I've a year to be in England, and I want to see everything."

"The best London society is undoubtedly a sight worth going through much to see," returned Frances, "but I'm afraid if you depend on us for seeing it, you will return to the bush unsatisfied."

He turned his head and looked at her inquiringly.

"Now what do you mean by that?"

"Simply what I say."

"I think you are mistaken," he said, going on with his fish; "Lady Langholme is so very kind, I am sure she will give me some introductions."

Frances smiled rather scornfully.

"You don't understand me," she said. "My mother's introductions won't help you. We ourselves do not belong to the inner circle."

"Oh! No, I didn't understand you. I don't now; at least, not entirely," he added, while a faint smile, indicative of some hidden amusement, flickered around his mouth.

Frances paused a moment as if thinking. Then she said:

"A widow with five portionless daughters is not thought much of in society. Of course we know a good many people and count duchesses and earls amongst our acquaintances—but, still—I should advise you to look higher for introductions."

"Thank you for your advice. I will consider the matter," he answered, and then for some minutes gave all his attention to his left-hand neighbour.

After dinner he did not approach Frances again until he was leaving, when he handed her one of her gloves. "I picked this up in the dining-room," he said; "I think it is yours."

"Thank you, it is," she answered.

"Good-night. Lady Langholme says you are always at home on Fridays."

"It's my mother's day," said Frances indifferently, "but you won't find it at all amusing."

"Thank you," he replied, "for what is, I suppose, meant for more advice."

Frances turned away, and made a mental resolution that Fridays should, in future, find her anywhere but at home.

Therefore when Mr. Fanshawe came on the following Friday he found the daughters of the house represented by Nellie and Ada. He appeared quite satisfied with the exchange, and went away without making the slightest allusion to their elder sister.

"My dear Frances," Nellie exclaimed afterwards, when the sisters were discussing their day's visitors, "he is perfectly charming! And so good-looking."

"The next time he comes," Dolly declared, "Amy and I mean to be to the fore."

"Yes," said Amy; "there's no use leaving the field to Frances, because she refuses to make use of her opportunities."

"My dear girls," said Ada from the writing-table, where she was fastening up a parcel, "I can tell you that he has already fallen in love with Nellie. Frances, dear, lend me your seal ring for a moment."

Frances looked rather discomposed.

"I have lost it," she said.

"Lost it!" they all cried. "Oh, Frances, and you valued it so much. How did you lose it, and when?"

"I missed it about a week ago."

"Why on earth did you never mention it before?"

"Oh, what's the good?"

"We could have helped you to look for it," said Ada, while Nellie glanced curiously at her sister's face.

Time went on, and Mr. Fanshawe became quite an habitué of the house. The four younger daughters flirted audaciously with him in spite of their mother's efforts to prevent their having the opportunity of doing so, while Frances, whom Lady Langholme threw prominently in his way, treated him with the coolest indifference.

He preserved an appearance of equanimity under both varieties of treatment, and was never for a moment thrown off his centre by anything. Nevertheless, the family came gradually to the conclusion that Ada had been right in surmising that he was seriously attracted by Nellie. Now Nellie was in love with an impecunious younger son, whom she never could marry, and this new turn of affairs lent piquancy to the situation. For while Nellie frankly expressed her belief that she had made a conquest of the shy Australian, she declined to say what she meant to do with her captive.

Matters had reached this point when the season drew to a close, and Lady Langholme began to review her prospects for the autumn. She had invitations enough for herself and one daughter to last till

she could return to London. The twins also had been asked to several houses where they were on sufficiently intimate terms to stay for a week or even more. But two of the girls were unprovided with any resources for the months of August and September.

"I don't know how we are to manage," sighed Lady Langholme.

"I always say, mother," said Frances, "that we should lead a much pleasanter life if we let this house for the season and took a house in the country from Easter till October, instead of depending on our friends for invitations."

"Well, we can't do that now, at any rate," said Nellie. "My idea is that Frances and I should go and spend the month of August with Cousin Laura at Anerley. I know they can't go away this year till September, and she would be delighted to have us."

"I think it would be a capital plan for Frances," said Lady Langholme. "But it would be dull for you. And though Cousin Laura might be glad to have one of you, she mightn't care to have both."

"If she can only have one," said Nellie, "it must be me."

"Why are you so anxious to go to Cousin Laura's?" Frances asked when the two sisters were alone.

"Because our shy Australian lives almost next door to her. I'll give him up to you, Frances, if you want him, but as you don't, I may as well keep him to play with while I make up my mind."

"You are behaving very badly," replied Frances. "It may be fun to you—but ——"

"It's death to him," interrupted Nellie, laughing. "Frances! Do you think it *is* death to him?"

"I think you have no right to go to Anerley unless you mean to marry him, and are sure mother will let you do it."

"I am sure mother won't let me. But if I decide on doing it, I will soon settle her."

"*I* shall not go to Anerley if I can help it," said Frances. "I have been stuffed down Mr. Fanshawe's throat more than enough."

Frances, however, could not help it. Cousin Laura expressed great delight at the idea of having both girls, and nothing else offered.

The day the arrangement was concluded Mr. Fanshawe called, and it was imparted to him.

"I'm so sorry," he said.

"How civil you are," cried Nellie.

"Because I shan't be there. I have settled to go to Switzerland in August."

"Oh, go to Switzerland in September. I counted on having you to show us about the Crystal Palace and help us to improve our minds."

"Improve your minds? With the open-air ballets and the variety entertainments?"

"I don't know what with, but I always thought the Crystal Palace was meant to improve people's minds. At any rate, we shall want you there. I can assure you September is just as good a time for Switzerland."

"It is not," said Frances, "nearly so good a time, while a London suburb in August is detestable."

He turned to her.

"You advise me not to put off going?"

"Most decidedly I advise you not," she answered.

He said no more on the subject, and other visitors arriving, he presently drifted into a corner with Nellie, and Frances noticed that their conversation seemed very earnest and confidential.

The fifth of August found both sisters established in Mrs Osborne's little house at Anerley.

When they entered the drawing-room dressed for dinner, the first person that greeted them was Mr. Fanshawe.

"So you haven't gone to Switzerland," said Nellie, without exhibiting any great surprise.

"Not yet. I may go to-morrow or the next day, or the day after. But I want to make sure that a London suburb in August is as detestable as Miss Scott says. I have a fancy that under certain circumstances it might be as pleasant as Switzerland."

At this speech Nellie looked down and played with the tassel of her fan.

A London suburb might be detestable in August, but it must be said that two of these three young people seemed to find it delightful.

Mr. Fanshawe spent most of his time with the Miss Scotts at the Crystal Palace, for Mrs. Osborne was the most easy-going of chaperons, and seemed to think that as long as her cousins enjoyed themselves, her duty was done. Therefore she gave Lawrence Fanshawe leave to come and go as he chose, and assured the girls that they sufficiently chaperoned each other when they went with him to the Palace. In vain Frances protested. Nellie coolly asserted her intention of going alone with the shy Australian if Frances would not come. Frances therefore had no alternative left her. And she enjoyed it. It was all so different from the life she was accustomed to lead. She would have enjoyed it very much, she said to herself, if she could have been sure of Nellie's intentions. Her regret at the line Nellie was taking, and her sympathy with Lawrence Fanshawe in the rude awakening which she feared awaited him, made her manner to him much softer, and there being no one now near to force her down his throat, she dropped the deliberate stiffness with which she had hitherto treated him.

So the days went on, till one day Mrs. Osborne awoke to the conviction that perhaps she had been a little too easy-going. She sought a private interview with Frances.

"My dear," she said, "I'm very much afraid Mr. Fanshawe is in love with Nellie."

"Yes," said Frances.

"But you know, my dear, that wasn't at all what was intended. I don't know what your mother will say. She meant *you* to marry him."

"Unfortunately," replied Frances, "Mr. Fanshawe is a gentleman who prefers to choose for himself."

"I don't see why Nellie shouldn't marry him. He is very nice."

"He is quite good enough for Nellie," said Frances, impatiently; "and if she will marry him ——"

"My dear! There surely can be no doubt of that."

"I don't know," sighed Frances. "I don't understand Nellie. She is not behaving like herself. But—Oh, no, as you say, there can be no doubt that she means to marry him. Don't worry yourself, Cousin Laura. Mother will be made to like it."

Mrs. Osborne went away sighing, and Frances hid her face in the sofa cushions and began to cry.

She was recalled to herself, however, by hearing her sister's step outside. She sprang up, and when Nellie came in was apparently engrossed in letter-writing.

Nellie glanced at her studiously-averted head with some curiosity, but made no remark on it.

"Mr. Fanshawe has just been here," she said. "He wants to make up a party for the fireworks to-morrow night. It's some anniversary or centenary or something, and they are going to be unusually magnificent. There will be a tremendous crowd; but that will be all the more fun."

"Nellie," said Frances suddenly, but without looking up from her writing, "I take it for granted you have made up your mind to marry Mr. Fanshawe?"

"No, I haven't."

"But this cannot go on. Cousin Laura has been speaking to me about it. She supposes it almost a settled thing, and is only uneasy as to what mother will say."

Nellie heaved a tremendous sigh.

"How tiresome you all are! Mr. Fanshawe has never proposed to me."

"But you know that he will. What do you mean to say to him?"

"I shall think about that when he does propose," replied Nellie, beginning to laugh.

"Nellie! Nellie! What has come over you? Is it right—is it womanly, to treat a man as you are treating Mr. Fanshawe? And such a man, so upright and honourable, and—and—he is the sort of man to suffer very deeply under such treatment."

Nellie laughed again, and then became suddenly serious.

"No," she said; "you are quite right. I am in a hole; for I

can't marry him, Frances. I—I care for Gerald Rhodes more than ever."

"Oh, Nellie, Nellie! What will you say to Mr. Fanshawe?"

"I won't say anything; I won't let him get to that, Frances!" She knelt beside her sister's chair and laid her head on her arm. "You must help me."

"I!"

"Yes. You can say something to him."

"Oh, no!" cried Frances. "Besides, he is not a man to take his dismissal from any lips but your own."

"I could not face him," said Nellie. "I should be obliged to accept him out of sheer cowardice. You must help me."

Her distress seemed so great that Frances reluctantly promised to give Mr. Fanshawe a hint of how the land really lay.

The following night the two girls, with Mr. and Mrs. Osborne, proceeded to the palace, where they were to find the rest of the party.

Mr. Fanshawe met them, as appointed, just inside the Low Level station.

"I have only been able to get four seats inside," he said; "the rest of us must take our chance on the terrace."

It had been a very sultry day, and now there were unmistakable indications of a storm; therefore some of the party looked rather dismayed at the prospect of the terrace.

"I think the weather will hold up for another hour," Mr. Fanshawe went on. "Only, those of us who are going to the terrace must hurry up or we shall get no places."

"Keep him with you," whispered Nellie to Frances. "Don't let him come near me."

"You are so much afraid of a thunderstorm," said Frances aloud, "that I think you had better go with Mrs. Osborne to the inside places."

Another young lady then declared her terror of thunderstorms, and a young man, who was evidently engaged to her, put in an eager claim to the fourth place, on the plea that they would need a man's protection in struggling with the crowd.

"It is a fearful crowd," said Frances to Mr. Fanshawe as, after agreeing all to meet under the organ directly the fireworks were over, the rest of the party hurried towards the terrace.

"It is," he answered; "in fact, there is no chance of our not losing each other unless we agree to keep in twos and twos. May I have the privilege of taking entire charge of you?"

Frances gave the required permission with her usual indifference, but was rather surprised to find in less than five minutes that it had been apparently a necessary precaution. The crowd on the steps leading to the first terrace was dense, and only a narrow passage was kept clear by policemen for ascending and descending.

When they reached the terrace, where the people were flitting thither and hither like a swarm of bees, the rest of their party were nowhere to be seen.

"It does not matter," said Mr. Fanshawe. "We shall find them when we want them, under the organ. In the meantime we had better take our seats."

This, however, proved to be an impossibility. When they applied at the little gate of one of the enclosures where the outside seats for the fireworks are placed, they were told that there was not one left. They tried on the other side with the same result.

"I'm awfully sorry," said the young man. "But if you are not tired we shall see just as well from the bank beyond, above the terrace."

"I am not a bit tired," Frances answered. She felt a curious sense of pleasure in this unconventional tête-à-tête. He was not in love with her, she said to herself, and after what she had promised to tell him, the probabilities were she would never see him again. Why, then, should she not yield to the charm of the hour?

Every moment the crowd increased, till they could hardly fight their way along.

"Do you mind taking my arm?" he said. "I think we should get along quicker."

She took it silently.

In a few minutes they reached the place he had spoken of. It commanded a good view of the lower terrace, and was a little less crowded than elsewhere. A distant growl of thunder was heard above the perpetual tramp of feet and hum of voices. The sky grew blacker. The lightning began to play, and the corresponding rolls of thunder to follow more closely upon each flash.

"I almost think we had better try and get into the palace," Mr. Fanshawe said.

He had hardly spoken when the loud report of the introductory rocket was heard. The shower of coloured stars showed for a second against the black sky, and became instantly invisible in a blaze of lightning which seemed to set the whole scene on fire and was accompanied almost simultaneously by a deafening crash of thunder.

Then shrieks of terror arose from the surging crowd, and there was a general rush for the various entrances to the palace. So sudden and so rough was the movement around Mr. Fanshawe and Frances, that she was compelled to cling to his arm to save herself from being thrown down.

The fireworks went resolutely on despite the complete eclipse which they suffered. The brilliant showers of rockets looked mere feeble sparks in the blinding glare of the lightning.

Frances and Mr. Fanshawe made their way as best they could towards the nearest door, but their progress was very slow, so intense was the crush.

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"Are you frightened?" he said to her, feeling her hand tremble on his arm.

"I am a little," she confessed. "One feels so helpless in this crowd, and if one were to fall."

They were now on the steps, where the policemen's endeavours to keep a way clear had been completely frustrated.

"You shall not fall," he answered, and quietly putting his arm round her, held her closely in a strong, firm clasp.

She made no resistance. She only vaguely wondered what her sisters would think of her—the proud, unapproachable Frances—if they could see her, and understand her perfect content in this strange position.

By and by they succeeded in getting into the building, and by taking a back way found themselves at the lower end where the courts are situated.

Mr. Fanshawe had released Frances the moment all danger of her being thrown down and trodden on was over. And they now made their way towards the organ. But it became evident that there was no chance of getting near it at present, or of finding their friends. The space was too tightly packed with people for the attempt even.

"When the storm is over they will go out again," said Mr. Fanshawe, "and then we may find our party."

So they wandered back again to the deserted, dimly-lit courts, and studied specimens of renaissance art.

"When are you going to Switzerland?" Frances suddenly asked.

"Why?" he said. "Are you going to advise me again to go?"

"Yes," she answered, steadily, "I am."

"Ah, no," he began. "But—yes. I will go to-morrow. I shall never have another night like this. Better that nothing should mar the memory of it."

Frances hardly heard him. She was training herself for her task.

"I think for your own sake you had better go. Nellie—Nellie is full of spirits and she does not think—she—she does not mean to flirt, but——"

"You mean," he said, "that Nellie will refuse me if I ask her?"

"Yes," she faltered. "Oh, I am so sorry, so sorry."

Her eyes were full of tears; her nerves were shaken by the events of the night, and she was less mistress of herself than usual.

"You are sorry for me," he said, rather bitterly, "because you think I love Nellie and she does not love me. Nellie has certainly not behaved well—from your point of view."

"I am so sorry, so sorry," Frances repeated, covering her face with her hands and sobbing.

"Will you do something to prove your sorrow?" he said at last, after watching her for some seconds. "It is but a little thing. Only to forgive me."

"To forgive you!" Frances said, wonderingly. "What for?"

"For a piece of presumption I am ashamed to confess. I don't know," he went on, "how you came to believe I was in love with your sister."

Frances started, and her face flushed.

"But I am going to give you a proof that it is not so, and then—bid you good-bye." He drew from round his neck a thin gold chain, slipped something off it and put it into Frances's hand.

It was her own lost seal ring.

Some instinct had once told Frances that the shy Australian was concerned in its disappearance, but later events had contradicted the supposition.

She stood and looked at it now in silence, trembling with conflicting emotions, of which anger was certainly one.

He looked at her deprecatingly; and, as she did not speak, he began to explain:

"I picked up your glove one day under the dinner-table, and put it in my pocket. I meant to keep it—for I already——" he glanced at her face, and reading no encouragement in it, left that sentence unfinished, and continued: "You were so cold and haughty that night that I had changed my mind and resolved I would think of you no more. I gave you back the glove before I left the house. When I got home I found to my surprise this ring in my pocket. I had noticed it on your finger, and noticed, too, that it was too big for you. I guessed that you must have drawn it off with your glove, and that it fell out of the glove in my pocket. It seemed an omen. I vowed I would not return the ring till you should willingly give me permission to keep it. But you have never given me a chance even to begin to win that permission. So there is your ring. I only ask you to forgive me."

He waited. But she still stood silent, looking at the ring.

"Surely you may forgive me. It is not much to ask out of all I want—and then I will trouble you no more."

"I forgive you," she said at last, in low, broken tones; "and—and—you may keep the ring."

"How could you play me such a trick?" said Frances to Nellie, when the sisters were alone that night, exchanging confidences.

"I behaved very well," answered Nellie. "I never gave him the least hint that you were to be had for the asking. And if, because he and I became such friends discussing my poor Gerald's prospects, people chose to think we were flirting, I can't help it. Oh, Frances, he has offered Gerald a splendid appointment on his own sheep farm in Australia. And you and I will be married on the same day, and we will all go out together."

So the shy Australian won his prize by a stroke of his usual audacity, and Lady Langholme now holds suburban balls in high respect.

POET LEONARD.

Poet Leonard is so clever,
He can hear the grass a-growing;
Knows the story of the river
Through the pleasant meadows flowing.
Knows what piping blackbird sings
To his mate in green recesses—
He has learnt a thousand things
That none other knows or guesses.

Daisies lift their starry faces
Smiling broadly up to greet him;
Bees and butterflies run races
Which shall be the first to meet him;
Squirrel talks to him in words
Up amid the branches swinging—
And in chorus clear the birds
Teach him all their arts of singing.

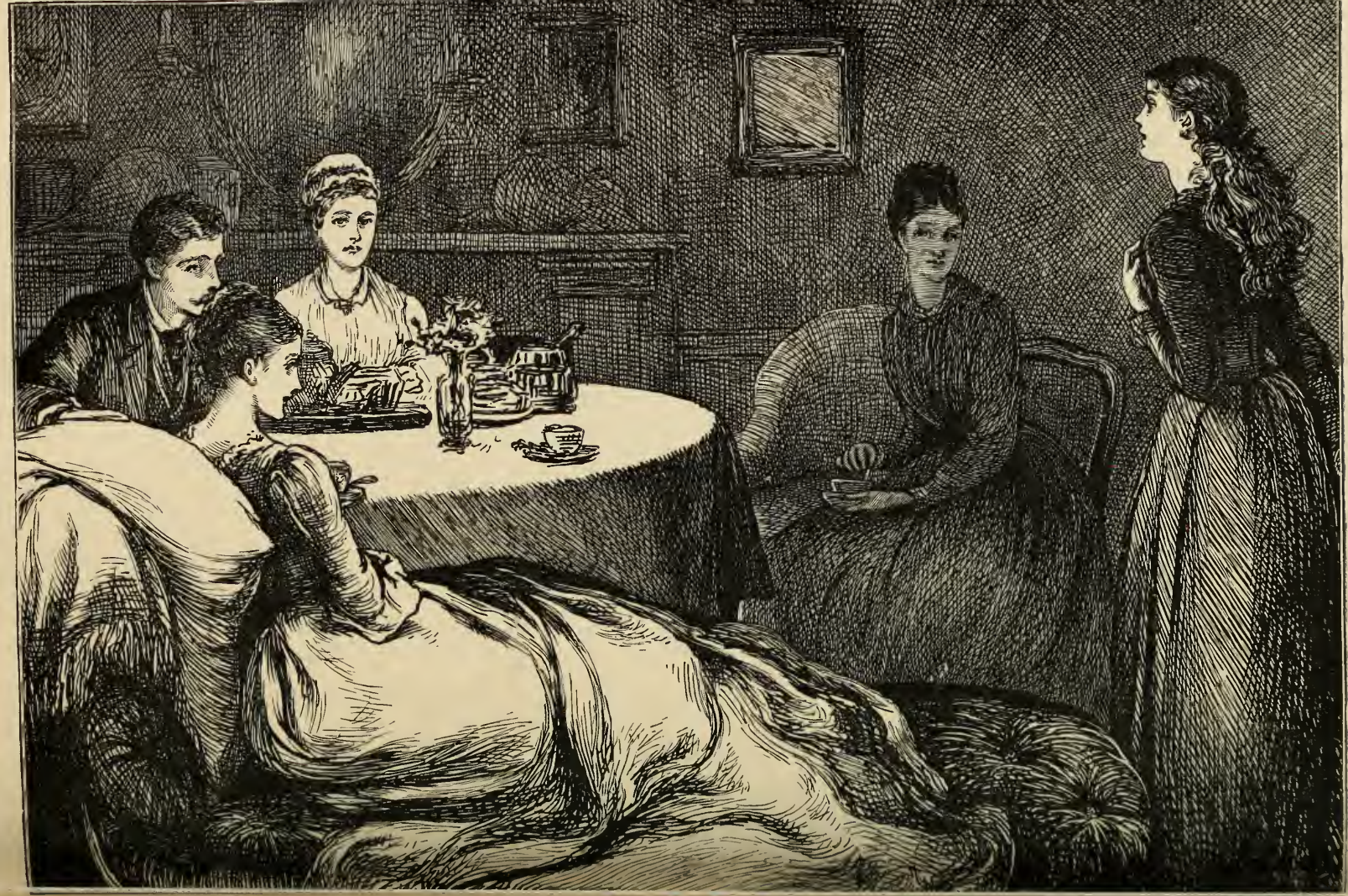
In his ear the nesting thrushes
Tell the number of their darlings;
To him small hedge-sparrow rushes
To complain about the starlings;
Wren and lark and linnet gay
Call to him from leafy hollows,
And at sunset round his way
Skim in circling flight the swallows.

In his brown Franciscan habit,
Cropping tender juicy grasses
At his ease, the nimble rabbit
Only nods when Leonard passes;
Early violet, primrose sweet,
First to him the Spring discloses,
And for him 'mid Summer's heat
Blush the latest July roses.

Poet Leonard's ten brief summers
Have been spent in field and wild wood,
Nature in her varying humours
Links herself with all his childhood.
Bird and beast in toil and play
Preach to him their glad evangels,
And about him day by day
Company the unseen angels.

Thus another Master-singer
Shall make glad this world bereaven
In the years to come, the bringer
Of a message down from Heaven.
Earth with mystery is rife,
Wisdom gropes and fain would know it—
God unlocks the doors of life
To the child-heart of the Poet.

Christian Burke.



M. ELLEN STAPLES.

THE ARGOSY.

DECEMBER, 1890.

THE HOUSE OF HALLIWELL.

BY MRS. HENRY WOOD, AUTHOR OF "EAST LYNNE."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

LADY ELLIOT'S PLEADING.

SIR Thomas Elliot had gone steaming up to London. It happened to be a slow train, stopping at every station, which drove the physician into a fever nearly as great as that of the poor lady he had been to visit, he was so intensely eager to meet his wife. A compliment he had not paid her of recent years.

Lady Elliot seized with avidity upon the information. It was a pretext for *demanding* of William to break off the match. "Of course," she said, "he will not think of entering upon the connection now."

A presentiment struck Hester that something was wrong when Ann went into the school-room and said Sir Thomas Elliot wanted her. These presentiments do come across us sometimes, without our knowing why or wherefore. Do they ever fail of being borne out? They never did with Hester. Surely there was nothing unusual, nothing to create surprise or uneasiness in Sir Thomas Elliot's paying a morning visit to the Miss Halliwells, connected as the families were about to be; yet, before Hester reached the drawing-room door, all that was to take place seemed to flash upon her. Sir Thomas turned at her entrance, and prefixed what he had to say by stating that he had been called to Middlebury the previous day on professional business.

"I am aware of it," answered Hester. "Mr. William took tea with us last evening, and mentioned that you were gone there."

"How did he know it?" growled Sir Thomas under his breath. "Called in and heard it from his mother, I suppose. Well, madam, to be brief—for I have patients waiting for me now at home and knew not how to spare time for coming here—I am concerned to tell you that I received an account of the late Dr. Goring ('Doctor,' as I hear him universally called, though I find he was only a general practitioner) which has considerably surprised me."

"In what way, sir?" asked Hester, with outward calmness, though her heart was fluttering sadly.

"Why, madam, can you be ignorant that—you must pardon my speaking plainly, I only repeat the statement as it was given to me—that Dr. Goring was suspected of having poisoned his wife?"

"Oh, sir!" interrupted Hester, "do not, I beseech you, speak so injuriously of the dead. Dr. Goring was an honourable man, of a kind, good nature, a gentleman and a scholar, one not capable of so dreadful a crime. I am cognisant of all the particulars, and I assert that whoever accused Dr. Goring of killing her was guilty of a wicked calumny."

"But he *was* suspected?" urged Sir Thomas.

"Not by those who knew him, and knew the circumstances."

"There was someone else mixed up in the affair, a governess?"

"Unhappily there was," answered Hester. "Say, rather, the author of it all, Sir Thomas," she added with emphasis. "But I must only say this in a whisper, and to you."

"Who afterwards became Dr. Goring's wife?" continued Sir Thomas, looking steadfastly at Hester.

"I am ashamed to say she did."

"Well, madam, this is just what I have heard. We will not differ about minor details, the facts are the same. Under the circumstances, you cannot wonder that I have forbidden my son to think more of Miss Goring."

"Oh, Sir Thomas Elliot!" exclaimed Hester. "It will be a cruel thing!"

"I hope not. I do not wish to hurt the young lady's feelings more than is unavoidable; and I cast no reproach upon *her*. I believe her to be, personally, most estimable. Still I must have due consideration for my son's honour and for that of his family; and a young lady liable to be pointed at as—as—in short, as the daughter of Dr. Goring of Middlebury, cannot be eligible to become William Elliot's wife."

He said more, but Hester was too grieved, too stunned, to hear clearly what it was. Nothing could soften the bare and abrupt fact that he peremptorily broke off the negotiation for an alliance with Mary Goring. She watched him get into his carriage from the window, her heart painfully failing her. *How* was she to break it to Mary?

That same day, a little later, William Elliot sat with his mother in her morning room. Marks of agitation were on both countenances; and to little wonder; for she was seconding what her husband had previously said to him, indignantly forbidding his intended marriage, and he listened in a state of rebellion, as indignantly remonstrating. Never, until now, had William Elliot been aroused to anger against his parents: he was not only a dutiful son, but fondly attached to them.

"Why persist in attributing our conduct to caprice, when we are only actuated by a desire for your honour and happiness?" urged Lady Elliot. "There is no help for it, William. You cannot marry one whose father's name was stained with sin."

"I have made it my business to inquire into the particulars of the prejudice against Dr. Goring," returned Mr. Elliot. "When my father stated to me, last night, what he had heard at Middlebury, I determined to seek out a fellow I know, who comes from there. Stone, his name is; he is reading for the Bar; his chambers are next to mine, in Lincoln's Inn. I have been with him this morning and heard the details of the affair, perhaps more fully than my father did; and I would stake my life on Dr. Goring's innocence."

"As if a London law-student, young and credulous as yourself, could know anything of such particulars!" slightingly spoke Lady Elliot.

"He was at home when it happened," retorted William, his pale face flushing with pain at his mother's tone. "His father, Stone of Middlebury, was solicitor to Dr. Goring; they lived within a few doors of each other; the families were on terms of intimacy, and young Stone knows all, even to the minute details. Do not cast ridicule upon what I say, mother. Dr. Goring was a cruelly aspersed man."

"No," said her ladyship.

"Yes," persisted Mr. Elliot. "Were I a perfectly uninterested party, I should say the same. I look at the facts dispassionately, and my reason tells me so."

"How very obstinate you are, William! Do you dispute that Mrs. Goring died the death she did?"

"No. On that point, unhappily, there is no room for doubt."

"Or that someone residing in the house must have dealt her death out to her?"

"So it would seem."

"Then who was that person?"

"Not her husband. There was another."

"The governess. But Dr. Goring afterwards made that woman his second wife. Was there no crime, no dishonour in that, William?"

William Elliot sat silent, his brow contracting. "He cannot be defended there: it was an unseemly connection: but Dr. Goring never would, or did, credit aught against her, and his having made her his wife proves that. He was a most honourable-minded, kind man, and a universal favourite. I tell you what, mother—had you and Sir Thomas not been secretly averse to my marriage yourselves, I should never have had Dr. Goring's conduct brought up as a plea against it."

"You are prejudiced and unjust," said Lady Elliot. "If we argue until night we shall not agree."

"I am sorry for that," observed William. "For, if so, only one course is open to me."

"What is that?" cried Lady Elliot, quickly.

"Though I assure you, my dearest mother, it will be with the very utmost reluctance that I adopt it.—That of marrying without your consent."

Lady Elliot half sprang from her seat, and a sound of pain, too sharp for a groan, escaped her.

"My happiness, my very life, are bound up in Miss Goring," he resumed. "To separate us now, after allowing the intimacy, sanctioning the measures for our marriage, would be cruel injustice. I will not submit to it."

"William," she uttered, in visible agitation, "you cannot marry in defiance of your father and mother. You dare not."

"Not without deliberation, and in grief and great repugnance, have I formed the resolution: but I owe a duty to Miss Goring as well as to my father and mother. The proposed allowance to me I shall not expect or ask for. The house I have taken I must give up, and look out for a smaller one; and we must make my own income suffice for our wants, until I can bring my profession into use."

"You speak of duty to Miss Goring," she resumed, with emotion: "have you forgotten that to your parents lies your first and foremost duty? A duty ordained of God?"

"Mother, I have forgotten nothing. I have debated the question with myself upon all points. And I believe that I am doing right in marrying."

"In defiance," she repeated, "of your father and mother? *In defiance?*"

"I am sorry that they drive me to it."

For several minutes Lady Elliot's agitation had been increasing, and it appeared, now, to rise beyond control. Two crimson spots shone on her pale cheeks, her slight frame shook with agitation and her hands were cold and moist as she grasped those of her son.

"Listen, William," she said; "I will tell you a painful tale. You may have gathered something of it in your boyhood, but not its details. *Will* you listen? Or are you going to despise even my words?"

"My dear mother! You know I will listen: in all reverence. If you would but afford me the opportunity to be reverent in all things!"

"I was a happy girl at home. My mother died—and then I owed my father a double duty. I was but a child, barely eighteen, when a young man, handsome, William, as you are now, was introduced to us. He was extravagant, random: but he loved me; and that was all I cared for. Our attachment became known to my father. He deemed this gentleman no eligible match for me: he doubted his ability, in many ways, to render me happy; and he put a stop to our

meetings. He forbade me to think more of him: he said if I did, in spite of his veto, pursue the acquaintance, that he would discard me from his house for ever. On the other side, the friends were equally averse to it; and *his* parents bade him, though in all kindness, shrink from the fruits of disobedience. His father, a clergyman, implored of him not to brave it: he told him that deliberate disobedience to a parent was surely visited on a child's head. Happy for us both had we attended to their counsel, but youth, in its ardour, sees not things as they are: in after years, when soberness, experience, judgment have come to them, they look back and marvel at their blindness. We, he and I—oh, William! that I should have such an avowal to make to you!—set our parents' interdiction at naught, and I ran away from my home to become his wife. That man was Thomas Elliot, your father."

She was excessively excited. Her son would have begged of her not so to disturb herself, but she waved away his interruption.

"We gloried in having deceived them. Not so much for the deceit, in itself—we had not quite descended to that—as that we had obtained our own will. But, William, how did it work? How does such sin always work?"

She paused, almost as if she waited for an answer. He did not speak.

"Look abroad in society, and watch the results: scan narrowly all those who have thus rebelliously entered on their own career. Sooner or later, more or less bitterly, retribution comes home to them. It may rarely be attributed to its right cause, even by themselves; and many there are who would laugh at what I am now saying. None have had the cause that I have to note these things; and it is from long experience, from repeated and repeated instances I have witnessed of the confirmation of my opinion, that my firm conviction has been formed. Some are visited through poverty; some in their children; some in themselves, in their unhappy life. We, William, have had a taste of all. In the early years of our union it was one struggle to live: perhaps you remember, yet, our pinchings and contrivances. My children died off, save you, one after the other; and she, Clara, who remained to us"—Lady Elliot sank her voice to a whisper—"were better off had she followed them. I and he whom I chose have had no mutual happiness, for we found that we were as unsuited to each other as man and wife can be. My father never forgave me; so, for his remaining years, and they were many, or seemed so, I was an alien from him. Thus have I dragged through life, trouble upon trouble pursuing me and the consciousness of my sin ever haunting me. William, before you talk of marrying Mary Goring, you should know what it is to brave and live under a parent's curse."

William Elliot did not reply, but his face wore a look of keen anxiety.

"At morning, at the sun's rising; at evening, when it sets; in the

nervousness of the dark night; in the glare of mid-day, was my disobedience present to me; heavily, heavily it pressed upon me. I would have forfeited all I possessed in life, even my remaining years, to have redeemed it: and, William, I prayed to God that He would in mercy keep *my* children from committing the like sin."

Lady Elliot paused for breath; and her face, a sufficiently young face still in years, but not in sorrow, was blanched and her eyes were strained on her son.

"I prayed it as the greatest mercy that could then be accorded me. I have never ceased praying for it. William, will you, my ever-loving and dutiful boy, be the one to set that prayer at naught?"

No answer. His lips were white as her own.

"You were my first-born, my first and dearest; in you rests all the hope left to me: what other comfort have I in life? I have said to myself, now and then, 'The closing years of my existence shall be brighter than the earlier ones, for my darling son shall be my stay and solace!' Oh, William, William! give me your promise now! I kneel to beg it. Say that you will never marry without our consent."

The lines of his pale face were working; it seemed that he would speak, but could not. Lady Elliot had shrunk down at his feet and would not rise.

"If you bring upon yourself this same wretched fate which has been our bane, I shall never know another moment's peace. I shall repine that you did not die in infancy; I shall wish, more than I have ever done, that I may die and be at rest from the trouble and care of this weary world. William, it is your mother who pleads to you. Promise that you will never marry in disobedience."

How could he resist such pleading—he, with duty and affection implanted in his heart by nature and hitherto fondly cherished? It was not possible. "Mother, I promise it," he uttered, "as long as you and my father shall live. After that ——"

"After that? Nay, I will not extort a further promise. You will then be your own master. But until that time—you pass your word, William?"

"I do. You have it."

"Thank God. Now I am at rest."

"Which is equivalent to undertaking never to marry at all," murmured the unhappy young man as he rose and quitted the room. "Oh, Mary! how shall I part with you?"

Hester was still standing at her drawing-room window after witnessing the departure of Sir Thomas Elliot, when she saw Lady Elliot's carriage drive to the gate and Miss Graves alight from it.

"I say," she cried, in her familiar way, as she entered, "what in the world is up? Do you know what I am sent here for?"

"Not exactly," replied Hester, though a dim suspicion floated through her mind.

"To take away Clara."

"To remove her entirely?"

"Yes; as far as I understand it. I was in the store-room, having a dispute with the cook about some pickles—for Lady Elliot looks to me to see to things; and if all the pickles and preserves in the house fermented and turned to froth and uselessness, she would never interfere herself to order it stopped—when one of the servants came in and said I was wanted in her ladyship's room. So up I went. 'Oblige me,' she said, 'by going to Halliwell House and bringing home Clara. The carriage is getting ready. Give my compliments to the Miss Halliwells and say they will have the kindness to forward me the account by post and send up her boxes by the carrier.' Those were her very words."

Hester made no remark.

"I never was so thunderstruck," continued Miss Graves. "'To fetch her home and her boxes!' I said. 'For good?'

"'Yes,' answered Lady Elliot.

"'Have the Miss Halliwells offended your ladyship?' I asked. 'Have you discovered any cause of complaint against them?'

"'Not against the Miss Halliwells,' she replied, in her stiff way. Unsociable she is at all times, but she was so much so this morning I did not dare to say another word. So all I could do was to put on my bonnet and obey orders: but I have been wondering the whole of the way down; and I met Sir Thomas in his brougham a little higher up. Had he been here?"

"He has not long left," replied Hester.

"Well now, do, Miss Halliwell, tell me what's amiss. Is it anything wrong between William and your niece? Have they quarrelled?"

"They are not likely persons to quarrel," rejoined Hester. "No. But Sir Thomas wishes to break off the marriage."

"Goodness me!" uttered Miss Graves. "And shall you allow him?"

"How can I help it?"

"Then of course you'll bring an action against them for Breach of Promise and all that."

"Breach of Promise!" echoed Hester, with a sickly smile. "Do not talk so, Miss Graves."

"Well, I should. What is their plea?"

"You must excuse my entering upon that. It is not," she hastily added, "anything personally connected with Mary. It relates to family matters; that much I will say."

"Does the objection come from Mr. William?"

"I think not. I am not sure."

"Well, it is incomprehensible," ejaculated Miss Graves. "I am sorry for Mary. It is a shabby trick to serve her."

Hester winced. "Shall I go and see that Clara is made ready?" she said.

"She must be made ready. Lady Elliot will not be pleased if I keep her horses waiting too long. By the way," added Miss Graves, "a thought has struck me, and it never did till this moment. Last night, after I went up to bed, I went down again for a book I thought I had left in the drawing-room. It was not there and I went to the dining-room. I had my hand on the door, when I heard the voices of Sir Thomas and Mr. William; very fast indeed they were talking; and I wondered, for Sir Thomas rarely talks much either with his wife or son. I suppose it had something to do with this business."

Hester supposed so likewise. She withdrew; and soon Miss Graves left the house with Clara Elliot. Nothing was said to the child but that she was going home for the day. Neither did Hester say anything in the house: the burden of her thoughts still was, how should she break the tidings to Mary Goring. She did not go again into the school-room, at which Lucy was surprised; but she felt unequal to it. And the evening came and still she had said nothing.

But the evening brought William Elliot. Hester knew his knock and ran out of the drawing-room, where they were seated at tea; and called to the servants to show him into the dining-room, not to let him come up; and then she went down herself.

"Oh, William!" she exclaimed, unable to restrain her tears, "what is to be done?"

He took her hands, kind as ever, but his own were unsteady and his face wore an unnatural paleness.

"What does Mary say? How does she bear it?" were his first words.

"I have not dared to tell her. I did not know how."

"That is well. She had better hear it from me."

"From you! Oh, no. She ought not to see you."

"Believe me, yes," he firmly rejoined. "None can soothe it to her, in the telling, as I can."

"It is the first shock that will be the worst, and I dread it for her."

He turned from Hester, put his arm on the window-frame and leaned his forehead upon it. She did not like to witness his emotion; his whole attitude bespoke despair.

"Let me see her," he resumed.

Hester reflected and believed it might be best. For what was she, what were all to her, in comparison with William Elliot? "One promise," she said. "You are not going to talk to Mary of a continued engagement, or—a—private marriage? Excuse me, but I have heard of such things being done."

"No; I give you my honour. I have already given it to my mother. This evening is to close my intercourse with Mary; and the interview I ask for is that we may bid each other farewell. I have no alternative. None. My mother——" he paused, and a sort of

shudder seemed to come over him——" my mother pointed out—that is—I would say she exacted a promise from me that I would never marry clandestinely ; without her full consent. And I gave it."

"Quite right," said Hester. "You could not have done otherwise."

"And now that they have taken this prejudice against Mary's family, to ask for consent would be fruitless. So there is no hope and I cannot help myself. But they had better ——" he lowered his voice to a whisper——" have destroyed us both, as her mother was destroyed. It would have been more merciful."

Hester went upstairs to the drawing-room and beckoned Mary out.

"Oh, aunt!" she said, "what is all this ? Is anything the matter?"

"Yes, dear child, there is," answered Hester through her tears as she fondly stroked down her hair. "I have known it all day, and I could not tell you. William Elliot will ; he is in the dining-room. Now do not agitate yourself."

"But what is it? Are we ——" she trembled excessively—"is he ——"

"Go to him, my darling. It is very cruel, but he will soothe it to you better than I can." So Mary went into the room and Mr. Elliot moved forward and closed the door behind her, while Hester paced the hall outside like a troubled ghost.

William Elliot drew Mary across the room in silence and folded her head down on to his breast and held it there.

"What is the matter ? " she asked, scarcely above her breath, while she shook visibly. "My aunt said she did not know how to tell me."

"Neither do I, Mary. Yet, told it must be. Can you bear it—whatever it may be ? "

"I will try to. I have borne some cruel things in my life."

"We are to be separated."

She had thought nothing less from the moment she saw her aunt's agitation. She did not speak ; only raised one hand and laid it on her chest. William Elliot held the other.

"After to-night we are to be as strangers," he added. "And this is to be our last meeting on earth."

"By your own wish ? " she murmured.

"Mary ! "

The tone of reproof, though it was mixed with tenderness, caused her tears to come.

"Then who is doing it ? "

"My father and mother."

"For what reason ? "

William Elliot hesitated. "It is a prejudice they have taken against the memory of your father ; your aunt can explain it. I will not, for I do not share in it."

"And this interview is to be our last ! " she moaned.

"Mary, I could have married you still, for I am my own master

and my property is sufficient to live quietly upon until I get my profession into play. But it would have been a marriage of defiance; and you, perhaps, would not enter into such."

She shook her head. "No—no."

"And so have brought down anger from on High upon us for disobedience."

She shivered, and held up her hand for him to desist.

"Such a marriage as was my father and mother's," he continued in a whisper. "She told me so to-day. She says that a curse clung to them for years; always has clung to them; and she implored me not to bring the like upon myself. She knelt to me—Mary, do you hear?—my mother knelt to me!"

"Yes, I hear all. Poor Lady Elliot!"

"Could I refuse to promise obedience not to enter into a rebellious marriage? And my mother also worked upon my duty and affection. Though I know not, in justice to you, whether I ought to have promised."

"There was no other course," she sadly answered. "I would not have married you, William, in opposition to your parents."

"Ah, Mary! they think they have done a fine thing in separating us; they say they have acted for my welfare and happiness. That people can so delude themselves! It will cost us dear."

Her tears broke into sobs and he clasped her closer to him, their hearts beating one against the other. Let us leave them to themselves: these sort of partings are too sacred to be touched upon.

It was quite dusk when he came out to leave and Hester was walking about still. The hall lamp was lighted and she saw the traces of emotion on both faces. Yes, on both; and you need not despise William Elliot for that. We do not, many of us, throughout our lives, go through such a trying interview as that had been to him.

"God bless you, dear Miss Halliwell," he said, "and thank you for the many courtesies, the kindness you have shown me. Thank you, also, for your care of Clara: I do not know whether anyone else has thought to do it. I hear she is removed."

"Yes. To-day."

He wrung Hester's hand and turned again to Mary. "And God bless *you*," he added, in a whisper: "remember, Mary, what I have said. Though they have succeeded in separating us, though your path must lie one way and mine another and we may not meet again, you will ever be first in the heart of William Elliot."

He departed; Mary disappeared; and Hester sat down in the dark room they had left. "The sins of the fathers shall be visited on the children!" she murmured to herself. "Was it ever exemplified in any case more plainly than in this? When Matthew Goring made love to his daughter's governess, or encouraged her to make it to him—whichever it might be—outraging his wife, outraging his children, outraging me (I, who pointed out his wicked folly to him

and got ridicule from him for my pains), did he imagine that very folly would be the means hereafter of destroying his dearest child's happiness and prospects in life? No. Yet it has proved so. Oh, men! you who have wives and children, how careful should you be to tread in the right path!"

Careful indeed! and Hester Halliwell is right. A little dereliction from it may seem but a light matter, not worth a thought, only worth the amusement of the moment *and scarcely that:* it seemed but so to Dr. Goring. Yet for him what did it bring forth? His wife's destruction; his disgraceful second marriage; his own early death; the breaking-up of his children's home and the driving them out, orphans, into the world. And now, as it seemed, the fatality was pursuing even them! Carelessly enough does man commit sin, but when on the point of wilfully falling into it, he would do well to pause and remember that the promises of God are never broken, and that one of those promises is "I WILL VISIT THE SINS OF THE FATHERS UPON THE CHILDREN."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

RIGHT AT LAST.

CHRISTMAS passed over, January passed over; and one morning in the first week in February it happened that Hester had business in town. Something arose, connected with the property of the Gorings, which rendered it necessary for her to seek an interview with the agent of Lawyer Stone, of Middlebury, who had made Dr. Goring's will. The agent was a Mr. Ecckington, living in the Temple; and Hester started by the omnibus the first thing after breakfast. She got into the Temple, that is, into its mazes and windings, and went about looking for Mr. Ecckington's chambers, for she had never been there but once and did not readily remember the spot. But she reached it at last: she knew it by a neighbouring pump, whose handle was padlocked; and mounted the stairs, a great height, for he lived on the top story. She stood a minute or two to recover breath—not being able to run up seventy or eighty steps as blithely as she once could—and then turned the handle and knocked briskly at the black door. And after Hester had done that, lo! and behold! there stood some great white letters staring her in the face: "Sergeant Pyne."

Sergeant Pyne was not Mr. Ecckington, that was certain; but before Hester had time to deliberate, a boy flung the door open. She asked for Mr. Ecckington.

"In there," said the boy, opening an inside door; and Hester entered the office. She knew the room again directly, though its furniture was different; and she saw the tops of the pleasant green trees outside. A gentleman in a grey coat, with a pen behind his ear, rose from a desk and came forward.

"Sir," said Hester, "I am in search of Mr. Ecckington."

"Mr. Ecckington! Oh, the former occupant here. He has removed, ma'am, to chambers in Lincoln's Inn."

The gentleman gave the address; indeed, took the trouble to write it on a card and directed her the best way to go there. Hester thanked him for his civility, which she thought extremely condescending for a sergeant: though it occurred to her afterwards that he might be only the sergeant's clerk. Hester went away, blaming Lawyer Stone's negligence in not having informed her of the removal of his agent, but had only gained the pump when her steps came to a halt, for it flashed across her mind that the address in Lincoln's Inn just written down for her was that of Mr. William Elliot.

She toiled up the stairs again, when Sergeant Pyne (or his clerk) assured her the address was Mr. Ecckington's: he knew nothing of Mr. William Elliot.

Hester got into Lincoln's Inn, nearly losing herself; and to her dismay found that Mr. Ecckington was out. "Gone before the Master of the Rolls," the clerk said; "and might not be in till late." So all Hester could do was to go back home again and write to appoint an interview. She had proceeded but a few steps when she came in view of a young gentleman sailing towards her, in a grey wig and black gown, which flew out with the wind on all sides as he walked. It cannot be said but that Hester looked on the wearers of these gowns with considerable awe (possibly because she had never seen much of them), and as there appeared scarcely space on the pavement for her and the gown to pass each other, Hester turned off it to give place. Imagine her astonishment when the gentleman stopped and held out his hand. She drew back, believing he mistook her for someone else and half dropped a curtsey in her humility.

Positively it was Lawyer Stone's son, Bob! And though Hester had nursed him many a time when he was a child, coaxed him, kissed him and once (if it may now be confessed) whipped him, she hardly presumed to let her hand meet his, in his new dignity.

"You were going to pass me?" he said.

"How was I to know you in that fine plumage?" asked Hester. "I thought it might be nothing less than a judge coming along, and stood aside to give him room. So you are called!"

"Oh, thank goodness, yes; the worry's over. I'm precious glad of it."

"I went to the Temple to find Mr. Ecckington this morning, and heard he had moved here," observed Hester. "Your father ought to have informed me."

"Ecckington is in Elliot's old chambers: took them off his hands," replied Mr. Stone. "Elliot gave up the law and is going to travel. He was red-hot for the Crimea, but now the war is over he would be a day too late for the fair there, so he is off somewhere else. He is up to his ears in preparation for his departure, for he

purposes being abroad for years, if not for the term of his natural life—as the Bench says to our transports. Hope it may be my luck to say it, sometime."

"What is the cause of Mr. Elliot's going?"

"He is in tantrums with his governor. The old folks put a stopper on his marriage with——I declare, Miss Halliwell, I beg your pardon! I forgot, for the moment, how nearly you were connected with the affair. I suppose you know more than I can tell you."

"Indeed, I know very little, beyond the fact that he and my niece are separated, Robert." (Hester brought the name "Robert" out with difficulty: it seemed too familiar so to address a personage in a wig and gown. Though, indeed, she used to call him nothing but "Bob.")

"They first, Sir Thomas and the old lady," continued he, in irreverent barrister fashion, "retracted their consent to the marriage, and then wormed an undertaking out of Elliot not to marry without. Which was like what the school-children say to their companions, when they have a cake from home and want to gormandise it all to their own cheek: 'Them as ask shan't have any; and them as don't, don't want.'"

The barrister laughed and so did Hester. In spite of his fine gown, he was Bob Stone still. It set her more at ease.

"So Elliot gave his word, and of course will stick to it," he resumed; "but afterwards, when he came to reflect upon the thing in cool blood, he felt that he had been harshly dealt by—tricked, in short, into promising away what we may call the subject's right of liberty. Altogether, he was disgusted with everything, threw up his profession, and means to throw up Old England. Good-morning, Miss Halliwell. I'll tell the governor of his negligence when I write to Middlebury."

Now it may sound (Hester remarked so afterwards) like a made-up incident, such as those we read of in a romance, to state that soon after parting with Mr. Stone, she met William Elliot. But it was so. She was standing in the great thoroughfare, looking out for the right omnibus, when he came tearing along, pushing straight forward and looking at no one, in as much bustle as if he had all the business of the city on his shoulders. Hester caught his arm to stop him. He looked ill and careworn: her heart ached to see him.

"What is this I hear, William, about you quitting England?"

"Why remain in it?" was his answer. "What have I left to look forward to?"

"Your profession," faltered Hester.

"I have lost interest in it. Men strive to get on, not only to attain eminence, but to win a home. They think of a wife; of children; of domestic happiness. They may gain the very highest honours of the land, but, without ties of the home and heart, such

distinctions are cold and valueless. So I abandon a country where hope is denied me."

"This must be as a death-blow to your father and mother," exclaimed Hester.

"A blow I believe it is. I wish Fate had been kinder to all of us."

"When do you go?"

"I leave London to-morrow night for Southampton. The steamer for Malta starts the following day. I visit the East first."

"To remain abroad—how long?"

"Probably for ever. Certainly for years."

"Oh, William!" exclaimed Hester, "if I could only persuade you to relinquish your purpose!"

He smiled—a sickly smile. "As others have sought to persuade me—ineffectually. How is it at home? Well?"

"Not very well," replied Hester, knowing to whom he alluded. "Men can wear out regrets with bustle and travel, as you are about to do; but women, who are condemned to inactivity, retain remembrance more keenly."

"God be with you, dear Miss Halliwell," he said, preparing to move on; "and take my dearest love and blessing to *her*. I dare say I shall never see either of you again."

He wrung her hand, in his emotion, till she thought he would have wrung it off; and a ring, which she happened to have on, cut right into her finger. But Hester was too much troubled to care for the pain. It seemed to her that Sir Thomas Elliot and his wife had much to answer for.

That same night Hester walked about her bed-room until the small hours of the morning. She was debating a question with herself. What *right*, human or divine, had Sir Thomas and Lady Elliot, in their obstinate pride and prejudice, to condemn two of their fellow-creatures to despair, even though one was the son to whom they had given birth? Did it not lie in her duty to point out to them their sin—to make an effort to awaken their own minds to it? Firmer and firmer became Hester's conviction that it was so; and when her mind was at length made up, a feeling came over her that neither her own strength nor her own spirit was urging her to it.

There was no time to let the grass grow under her feet, and the next afternoon found Hester at Sir Thomas Elliot's. Lady Elliot was pitiably subdued by sorrow, and would have given her own life to keep her son in England. Hester entered upon the matter, giving her opinion unshrinkingly, but Lady Elliot was blind to all sides of the case save her own, and spoke up, passionately complaining.

"No joy have I had in life; no peace; nothing but despair: before one affliction yielded to time another arose. I had nothing left but him; nothing else to comfort me on the wide earth; and now he is going away for ever, for he is resolved not to return to England.

To-night he comes to take his leave and I shall see him for the last time."

"And thankful I am, ma'am, that I am not in your shoes," said Hester. "If that young man decamps into unknown regions, among infidels and Hottentots and rushes into sin and everything that's bad, to drown his unhappiness, you and his father must answer for it to his Maker, for you alone will have driven him to it."

"Oh, of course, of course," she answered, in tones of the bitterest sarcasm; "it has been my fault through life; everything; no one's but mine. I wish it were ended!"

"I think a great deal has been your fault, Lady Elliot," rejoined Hester. "Various afflictions have come to you, *as they come to all*, and yours have not been worse than many others are. But have you striven to avert them, to turn them away? Have you been patiently submissive under them and, accepting them as chastisements sent by God, resigned yourself fully to His good will? Have you endeavoured to make sunshine out of the blessings they have been mixed with?"

"What blessings?" asked Lady Elliot. "I know of none."

Hester gazed at her in surprise. The fact was, Lady Elliot had so accustomed herself to living a life of repining, that her mind was perverted and she could see no good in anything.

"Does your ease count for nothing, your freedom from the cares of the world, your luxurious home?" cried Hester, as she directed her eyes round the room. "Do you forget the ample means you possess of gratifying every imaginable wish and the golden opportunities afforded you of bestowing a tithe of your superfluous wealth upon those steeped in poverty? Above all, ma'am, do you reflect how rich you are in your son? What good gifts are there, whether of person or of mind, that have not been dealt out to him with an unsparing hand? No blessings, Lady Elliot!"

"I *was* blest in him," she answered; "I was, I was. And I shall be so no more."

"Oh, Lady Elliot, how blest you might still be!" uttered Hester. "Believe me, God's mercies are given to you *abundantly*. If you could but see them! If you would but consent to tear the scales from your mind and convert its gloom into sunshine! Did it ever occur to you to ask what children are bestowed on us for?"

"For our punishment," perversely answered Lady Elliot. "Mine have been."

"They were bestowed on us that we might promote their happiness here and so lead them to Heaven through their gratitude, their thankfulness of heart," said Hester. "Not that we might selfishly crush their innocent hopes and thwart their wishes, at our own caprice or pleasure, driving them into rebellion, and so on to deceit, recklessness and evil."

"Then, when my father opposed me in my wish to marry," Lady

Elliot resumed, in almost a sullen tone, "you would say he ought to have consented to it? Is that your argument? It is a new one."

"No, I hope such an argument is not mine. Your father was right. The objection was to Thomas Elliot: and it was not a frivolous chimera, as in your son's case. Mr. Freer thought he was not calculated to make you happy; and his worldly circumstances were against any marriage, for he possessed nothing. The error, there, lay with you, Lady Elliot. Your duty was to bow to your father's decision and submissively wait, hoping that time would subdue the objections. You and Thomas Elliot were both young enough."

"You seem to be pretty well acquainted with my family affairs, Miss Halliwell!"

"I am not a total stranger to them. I have been for some years intimate with the Thornycrofts of Coastdown, who are relatives of the Elliot family; and I was myself once on the point of marriage with your husband's cousin, the Reverend George Archer: but I think you have heard this before. I have had my sorrows in life, Lady Elliot, as fully as most people: sorrows of the heart, of the inward life; as also of the outer one. But I have striven, by patient resignation, to make the best of them; and they are sorrows to me no more. Yours will pass away, if you so choose; and the world will become pleasant to you—always remembering to walk in it as your probation to a better. Try it, Lady Elliot."

"Try what?"

"To make your own happiness; to make your husband's, *which you have never yet heartily striven to do;* to make your son's. You will live to thank me for having suggested it."

Lady Elliot burst into tears and laid her head on the sofa cushion. And at that moment Sir Thomas Elliot appeared at the door and stood quietly rooted to it, in surprise. Lady Elliot, from her position, could not see him and Hester pretended not to. She thought it well that he should hear a bit of her mind, as well as his wife.

"William is going forth into exile," she resumed to Lady Elliot, "a lonely, miserable man: he voluntarily separates himself from you. Would he do this if you were true to him, a loving mother? And you, what will remain to you after his departure? Discontented repining, bitter self-reproach, a yearning for him whom you cannot then bring back. You say that a curse—though I assure you I shrink from repeating such a word—has followed you through life, follows you still. Break it, Lady Elliot."

Lady Elliot raised her head and looked at Hester.

"Keep William by you, a son to rejoice in and be proud of. Let him make his own happiness and help him in it: take an interest in his plans, in his profession, and be to him a tender friend. Diffuse a pleasant spirit in your home: make the best of poor Clara and

win back the affections of your husband, as you strove to win them in your girlhood: and, above all, cherish in your heart a spirit of thankfulness to ONE, who has put all these blessings in your way, a repentant, submissive, hopeful spirit—and none were ever submissive to Him in vain. Where would the curse be then? Gone, Lady Elliot."

"If I could think—if I could think it has been, in a measure, my own fault, in thus encouraging a murmuring spirit of rebellion!" she wailed, clasping her hands in intense anguish. "Oh! if I *could* change this black despair for peace! If I could indeed retain William at my side! If I could find happiness in what has been a thankless home!"

"I'll help you," cried Sir Thomas, coming forward. "If you will only manage to keep William in his own country and give us a bit of cheerfulness at home, instead of gloom, I will do my part towards it." He looked, as he spoke, more like the merry Tom Elliot of her girlhood than he had done for years. Hope leaped up into Hester's heart: she thought she saw her way becoming clear and she explained the purport of her visit to Sir Thomas.

"In point of family, Mary Goring's is not inferior to yours: and you and I, Sir Thomas, only narrowly escaped being cousins in early life."

"Through George Archer, the booby!" uttered Sir Thomas. "You would have saved him, Miss Halliwell."

"And—you will pardon me for stating it, Sir Thomas—when I and George Archer were once jestingly comparing notes as to our relative importance, my family, in point of descent and connections, was found to be superior to his and yours. Believe me, though you have risen in the world, Mary Goring's descent is equal to William Elliot's."

"But it was not Miss Goring's family we objected to," returned the knight.

"Oh, yes, it was, in reality," said Hester. "Again I say, excuse my speaking freely, Sir Thomas; the subject justifies it. You and Lady Elliot were mortified because William did not choose a wife from the higher ranks of life. You stated to me, Sir Thomas, that, personally, you estimated Miss Goring highly."

"I do," he answered.

"And you cannot, you, a sensible man, believe that Dr. Goring was guilty. It is impossible that you can do so, if you have dispassionately examined into the details of the affair. Imprudent he was; infatuated; nothing more—and he paid the penalty. Do you think, if he had indeed committed a crime so awful and upon my own sister, that I would come here to excuse him, to protest there was no stain on his character? No, Sir Thomas. I have my own high and responsible duties in life to perform; and I would not say or do a thing that my conscience disapproves. When I assert Matthew

Goring's innocence, I assert what I believe to be as true as that there is a heaven above us."

He made no reply.

"Think not I come here as a petitioner to urge my niece's claims, or to protest against her wrongs. Though the wrong, allow me to say, Lady Elliot, was forced upon her by your side, not sought on mine, for it was you who deliberately suffered the intimacy between her and William to grow up."

Sir Thomas nodded his head approvingly. No danger that he would gainsay that.

"No," resumed Hester, "I came here with no selfish motives, but because it was essential that someone should point out to you both how grievously you were erring; and I believed the task was allotted to me. To drive William away from his country and destroy his prospects in life is a heavy sin to lay to your door. How will you atone for it?"

Sir Thomas Elliot began pacing the room with uneasy strides. Presently he spoke, but in a reluctant tone.

"Since I first heard of the affair at Middlebury, I have learnt more of its particulars. And I confess I now think it probable that Dr. Goring was—so far as regarded his wife's death—an innocent man."

"Then act upon it, Sir Thomas," cried Hester, briskly. "Stop your son's voyage, now, at the eleventh hour; and restore things to their former footing."

"Louisa, what do you say?" he asked of his wife. "I told you, once before, that in this affair I would abide by your decision."

"I do not know what to say," sobbed Lady Elliot. "If I could think ——"

"Think that you are going to be happier than you have been for many years," interrupted Hester. "Think that your dear son, whom you grieve as lost to you, will remain at home to comfort you with his love: think of the merry romps you will have with his children: and when the time arrives that you are laid on your dying bed, Lady Elliot, think that he will be at its side to bless you, instead of beyond your reach, hundreds of miles, over the salt sea."

She rose from the sofa, and the tears were streaming down her cheeks as she held out her hand to Hester. "Miss Halliwell, you have conquered. Thomas," she added, turning to her husband, "we may have done wrong to William. Let us repair it."

"With all my heart," he replied. "Anything is preferable to the gloom which has latterly overhung the house. Miss Halliwell, we have to thank you for this. But if we are really to turn over a new leaf and look out for—what was it?—sunbeams, you must come often and repeat your lessons; otherwise, we may forget the way and lapse back again."

"Oh, yes, I will be sure to come. But I do not think you will do

that now. And I assure you, Sir Thomas Elliot, I never felt so proud in my life. To think that my poor, homely pleading has effected this great purpose! But it was not mine. There was ONE, greater than we are, who put it in my heart to come and has helped me through with it."

They pressed Hester to stay to—she did not hear whether it was tea or dinner. The latter, she thought; but if so, it must have been kept waiting a considerable time, for it was long past seven o'clock. Not she. She was too anxious to reach home and impart the joyful news to Mary Goring.

Sir Thomas sat down by his wife as Hester left the room. "I will do my part towards it all, Loo," he whispered: "on the old faith of Tom Elliot. Here's my hand upon it."

She smiled pleasantly, and put her hand into his. "Oh, Thomas," she said, "we have both been wrong, all these years: I see it all: and I more wrong than you. Let us forget and forgive and try to make life pleasant to each other."

His smile echoed hers, and he leaned forward and kissed her. The first happy smile, the first voluntary kiss, they had exchanged for years.

"I think it seems as if the curse were gone," she murmured, the rich glow of hope lighting her cheek.

"I never believed there was one," smiled Sir Thomas, "except in your imagination. What may have seemed like it we brought daily upon ourselves."

"By not making the best of things," she eagerly answered. "Oh, yes: it was so."

As Hester was passing the dining-room door, Clara Elliot saw her, and, with a scream of delight, ran out, jumping around her like a little dog. Poor child! her mind was no stronger. But of that there was no hope. Miss Graves looked out also, very much astonished to see who was the visitor. Hester did not explain.

"Why do I never go to your house?" Clara exclaimed. "It is such a long while! Why don't you send Mary to see me?"

"Mary has been very ill, my dear," answered Hester. "She cannot go out now."

"Mary ill! Let me come and see her to-morrow."

"Yes, dear child, you shall," interrupted Lady Elliot, advancing. "And I will go with you. Oh, Miss Halliwell!" she whispered, shaking Hester once more by the hand, "I think you are right. You don't know what a load is taken off my heart."

As Hester left the street door, who should be stepping out of a cab but William Elliot. She waited while he paid the cabman and then took him by surprise.

"I have just left your father and mother."

"Indeed!" he said, looking almost incredulous. "This is my fare well evening with them, Miss Halliwell. I go down by the night train.'

"So you persist in leaving England?"

"I sail to-morrow."

"Now which would you rather do, Mr. William?" cried she. "Go abroad in that horrid steamer—no disparagement to it in particular, but all steamers are horrid—from which you will wish yourself out again before you have been a couple of hours at sea, or stop at home and marry Mary Goring?"

"Oh," he evasively answered, while the red colour flushed into his face, "I am so overwhelmed with preparations for the start that I can think of nothing else just now."

"But just ask yourself the question: *and answer it as you will.*"

There was something in Hester's tone which struck upon him, even more forcibly than the words. He grasped her by the shoulder —what *did* she mean?

"Go in, dear Mr. William," whispered Hester. "I have paved the way for you with Sir Thomas and Lady Elliot. I think if you do prefer Mary to the steamer, you may have her."

Hester never knew whether she reached home on her head or her heels. A dilatory omnibus, given to stopping, took her, but she herself was not clear upon the point. Lucy exclaimed at her long absence and inquired if she had taken tea.

"No. I should like a cup."

She took a light and went upstairs to the best bed-room, which had been given up to Mary for the illness which had followed the breaking of her engagement. She had fallen into a doze as she lay on the sofa. Quietly taking off her own cloak and bonnet, Hester sat down by her. Nothing of Mary could be seen but her face, for she had wrapped a shawl round her and someone had thrown a covering over her feet. Her brow was contracted, as with pain, and her mouth stood slightly open—often the case in illness—but the young face, in spite of its whiteness, was lovely still. "We will soon have that fair brow smooth again, my child," thought Hester, as she gently stirred the fire into a blaze.

Presently Hester heard a noise as of talking, downstairs. It mounted to the drawing-room adjoining; and then Lucy appeared, carrying the cup of tea. But Hester rose from her seat in amazement, for stealing in after her was William Elliot. "The idea of his coming down to night," thought Hester. "And how quickly he must have followed upon me!"

"I could not help it," Lucy whispered to her, in a tone of apology. "He would see Mary, and when I urged that she was in her bed-room, he said what did that matter? Oh, Hester! he says she is to be his wife, after all!"

The bustle woke Mary, and the hectic flushed into her cheek when consciousness fully returned to her. She would have risen up, but William Elliot prevented it. He was shocked to terror at the change he saw in her and, as he told Hester afterwards, believed

her to be dying. He leaned over her with his gentle tenderness and his hot tears fell on her face.

"Oh, Mary!" he whispered, as he laid his cheek to hers: "I see how ill you have been, but you must bear up for my sake. Our separation is over, my darling: my mother will be here to-morrow to tell you so. Very soon, very soon, you will be all mine."

"But what about the steamer, William?" asked Hester in the gladness of her heart, but making believe to be very serious.

"The steamer must go without me."

"But your preparations, your outfit and your great strong boxes? Are they to be wasted?"

"I will give them to you if you like, Aunt Hester," quoth he. "I am in a generous mood."

"And go back to the law again?" she questioned.

"Of course. Hoping, in time, to lord it over you all on the woolsack. Who knows but I may?"

Hester snatched a moment to drink her tea. Mary, always thirsty now, glanced at it with eager eyes. Then William Elliot pleaded for some; to put him in mind of old times, he said, and convince him he was not dreaming. Next, Lucy thought she should like a cup, instead of supper. So they had the round table drawn before Mary's sofa and actually, as Hester expressed it, held a tea-party in the bed-room. She said she hoped no one would reproach her with its being improper. When Frances Goring came in from the school-room to say good-night, there they were seated at it, with a great plate of buttered toast before them; and Frances looked as if she never meant to recover her astonishment. She stood just inside the room, staring at William Elliot.

"Ah, Frances! how do you do?" he said, holding out his hand.

But Miss Frances, like the schoolgirl she was, stood immovable. "What have you come again for, Mr. Elliot?" she brought out.

"I? To have another of your aunt's housekeeping lessons," he merrily answered. "Touching the apple-tarts and legs of mutton, you know. She must give it to me, especially to-night. Mary is too ill."

"And are you coming again—other nights?"

"I hope so."

"Oh!" cried Frances, clasping her hands, "I am so glad! It seems like those famous evenings back again. If you could only make Mary well, as she was then!"

"I'll try," said William Elliot.

Hester went downstairs with him when he was leaving. "You see how ill she looks," whispered Hester. "Do not set your heart too steadfastly upon her."

"Change of prospects will do much for her," was his reply, "and change of air may do the rest. She shall have that with me."

"With you, Mr. William!"

"Yes. And you know what that must imply," he returned, with a smile of very decided meaning. "So, if the former preparations are done away with, dear Miss Halliwell, you had best set about some more with morning light. We have suffered too much to risk another separation; and I promise you that, ill or well, Mary Goring shall soon be Mary Elliot."

Lady Elliot came the next day and burst into tears when she saw Mary: like her son, she was deeply shocked. Clara would not go away again, so Lady Elliot left her to remain a day or two.

However, as William Elliot had said, change of prospects seemed to do wonders for Mary. Her recovery was rapid, not all at once to robust health, but sufficiently so to remove their fears. The wedding was fixed for the last week in April. Hester was for deferring it till the Midsummer holidays, when the house would be free and Mary stronger, but Mr. Elliot banteringly inquired if she would not prefer to defer it till Midsummer two years. And the Reverend Alfred Halliwell took a long journey across the country to marry them, as he had once before taken a journey to marry her unfortunate mother. He was going to allow himself a fortnight's holiday; that is, from the Monday till the next Saturday week, a friend taking his duty for him on the intervening Sunday and Mr. Dewisson's curate taking it on the week-days. Previously to this, his son George had sailed again as third officer, in a far better ship and service than the last.

They had a jolly wedding: as Master Alfred Goring expressed it. Lady Elliot was in a dazzling dress of satin and gold, which caused every eye in the church to water and threw Mary's white silk quite into the shade. Frances Goring was bridesmaid, thereby acquiring an unlimited amount of vanity, which she has not lost yet.

Hester never could tell how she comported herself at the breakfast-table, except that it was very badly. She took the top of the table, having Sir Thomas Elliot on her right hand and Mr. Pepper, a grey-haired gentleman, in gold spectacles and heavy gold chain, on her left. The clergyman was at the foot of the table, having the bride and bridegroom on one side of him and Lady Elliot on the other. Sir Thomas made merry over Hester's nervous mistakes and kept everyone alive with laughter. He seemed quite to have returned to the free and open manners of his youth; and Hester felt certain that he *was* doing his part of the bargain, as he had promised Lady Elliot. It is probable they both felt, as they looked around, that Mary Goring's connections were not so very despicable, after all, or so far removed from their own position. Looking down upon the numerous guests was the portrait of Mary's ancestor, the Lady Hester Halliwell. Wonderfully, with years, had Hester grown like it. Strangers calling, often thought it was Hester's portrait and that she had dressed herself in the old style of George the Second to have it taken in. Lady Elliot looked happy too, really happy, as Hester had

never seen her look until lately. Miss Graves was in high feather and sat next to Master Alfred, whom she kept in order, at the request of Hester. She had not gone to church, having remained with Clara, for they had not ventured to take the latter. Poor Clara! she was dressed out as splendidly as her mother, laughed, by starts, all breakfast time and nearly had one of her eating fits, but William Elliot had her by his side and restrained her. Jessie Pepper and little Jane Goring were also at the table: as to the other pupils and the teachers, they had holiday and a handsome dinner; so everyone was pleased and the day passed off delightfully.

They left early in the afternoon, the bride and bridegroom, in one of Sir Thomas Elliot's carriages, for the London-bridge Station, intending to reach Dover that evening and France the following day; purposing to remain on the Continent all the summer and perhaps the autumn. "It will benefit Mary," William Elliot had said, "and we both deserve a holiday." Meanwhile, Lady Elliot and Hester had promised to occupy themselves with the furnishing and arranging of their new residence, Mr. Elliot especially charging Hester to see to the setting-up of the housekeeping department. Hester was the last to shake hands with him in the hall, whilst Sir Thomas was handing Mary to the carriage.

"You will take care of her, William?" whispered Hester, the tears falling from her eyes and she calling them "tiresome" for it. "She cannot be said to be well yet."

"You know there is no need to give me the injunction," William Elliot answered, whilst the ingenuous flush stole into his face, the sweet, earnest look to his truthful eye. "When I bring Mary home again, she will be so improved you will none of you recognise her." And Hester felt that his words were likely to be verified.

Late in the evening, when all had dispersed, the two sisters and their brother sat around the fire. They had not so sat, alone, for many, many years. "And," Mr. Halliwell said, remarking upon it, "we may never so sit again."

Hester told him the story of Lady Elliot, how she had been aroused from her grumbling and sinful discontent: that very day she had again fervently thanked Hester for awaking her to hope and to peace in life.

"She should have had half the trials to endure that have fallen to my lot," exclaimed the clergyman.

"Do you know what I have often thought of?" remarked Lucy; "often and often. That theory of Aunt Copp's—that because our father heedlessly risked his money and lost it, not because he was poor, but to increase his riches when he had already plenty, leaving us almost destitute, we, his children, should have to wrestle with hard fate through life. Do you remember her saying it, Alfred? do you, Hester?"

They nodded. "It has proved tolerably true with most of us," said Mr. Halliwell. "But God has been very good to us, for—thanks be unto Him!—our trials might have been so much worse; and lately they have been considerably lessened. Sorrows are the necessary evils of mortality, but we can well endure them when we look to that blessed land of rest which they are fitting us for. Many, whose outward lot is cast in brightness, make sorrow for themselves: look at what you say of Lady Elliot."

"Oh, yes," interrupted Hester; "indeed we have MUCH to be thankful for. Brighter days are come upon us all than we once hoped for; and I trust our hearts have been so purified that we may 'endure to the end.' But I wish I could arouse the whole world to a healthy state of mind, as I was humbly instrumental in arousing that of Lady Elliot."

I wish she could. For let every one of God's creatures be fully assured that they possess within themselves the power to make or mar, in a great measure, their own happiness here; *that upon the state of the mind and heart depends life's sunshine.*

THE END.

SONNET.

THOU deadly weariness of life, begone!
Insidious foe of every noble thought,
I know thee but too well. Ah! haunt me not
With Heaven's rest. The battle is not won!
The weary hireling's task is not half done!
Spite heat of sun and chill night dews, the strife
Between Desire and Will is yet as rife
As e'en in ardent youth. When years have flown
I, too, may take my wages, and sit by
The path where others crowd in eager race
For Life's sweet prizes. Oh! more sweet is death;
More blessed sleep than waking, to the eye
That sees and loves not. 'Tis God's tender grace
That takes, e'en as it gives, our mortal breath!

JULIA KAVANAGH.

THE POWER OF GRATITUDE.

By Anne Beale.

"He that expecteth nothing will not be disappointed." On this principle, let no man expect gratitude. A benefit is no benefit if a return has to be made: and gratitude is often a very painful return.

Still we sometimes get it when and where we least look for it; and what man holds back, the so-called inferior animals occasionally give. We know that the horse and dog are grateful, but then they are not inferior animals, but often superior to their master, or tyrant, man. What shall we say of gratitude in cats and birds? Having met with one or two instances of it, we venture to repeat them, though with a trembling fear that some sceptical people will declare that there is more greed than gratitude in them. However, we know of a grateful blackbird, and his gratitude was very sweetly expressed: also of a grateful cat, whose language was less dulcet.

To a house in a small country town was appended the smallest of gardens. The three walls that surrounded it were well covered with ivy, which had grown almost into trees at the corners. The border underneath the walls was filled with plants, the path round it neatly gravelled, the little grass-plot in the centre mown to the extinction of dandelions, and the beds therein a blaze of red geraniums, calceolarias and other brilliant flowers.

But it was so small that scarcely did the sparrows condescend to visit it. To be sure they had happier hunting grounds in a large, tree-filled and fruit-and-flower-stocked garden that surmounted it on one side, while on the other was a walled space uniform with itself. At the back was a stable-yard, unfrequented by songsters—at least, by feathered ones.

One autumn day there was a tremendous hail-storm. We looked forth in dismay on the flower-beds. They had lately been filled by the gardener of some generous friends in the neighbourhood, who sent us, periodically, a wheel-barrow of plants. The hail would assuredly destroy them. Down it came, slanting, apparently, from the hill-garden on the right. Suddenly it bore with it, and deposited violently on the greensward, something black.

"It must be a bird," we exclaimed, and ran out and picked it up.

It was a blackbird. We took it into the house. At first we thought it was dead, but it was only paralysed with terror, so we chafed and restored it. The storm suddenly abated, and we returned with it to the garden, carrying a handful of crumbs. We placed bird and crumbs on the grass, and were surprised to see it plume

itself and peck the crumbs. At last it flew off, up to the trees in the big garden on the hill.

The next day, sunshine had revived the flowers, and about the same time in the afternoon that had heralded in the hail, the blackbird reappeared, accompanied by another blackbird.

Whether they expected more hail they did not say, but the one which had found safety in the wee parterre had evidently communicated the fact to the other, probably her mate, and had led him into, not out of, Paradise. They were male and female, for the one was of the jet-black plumage acquired by the gentleman, the other of the brownish-black feather distinguishing the lady.

Every day did these new friends pay us a visit. As we had no fruit trees in our tiny preserve, they did us no harm; on the contrary, they proved excellent allies, clearing out slugs, worms and such insects as attacked the flowers.

We fed them through the winter, and if by chance they did not appear, were very unhappy, wondering what evil fate might have overtaken them. They evidently considered themselves "monarchs of all they surveyed," and when, in the frost and snow, smaller birds disputed their domain and food with them, held their own, though their nature is shy. They passed the night and twilight hours elsewhere, but rarely failed to visit us during the day.

One morning in early spring, hard upon the Feast of St. Valentine, we were suddenly regaled with a song so sweet, prolonged and inspiriting, that we looked out of our bed-room window in amazement, for song-birds usually poured forth their melody in the region above and beyond, the dear robins excepted.

There were the blackbirds perched upon one of the tall ivy bushes in the corner of the wall. The male was piping that exultant song, while the female was examining the big ivy bush. This proved to be the first preparation for house-building.

From that time forth, business as well as music occupied the pair. They built their nest in the ivy, choosing the site with cunning care. It was pretty to watch them flying from highland to lowland, carrying bits of moss, small sticks or grass, for the outer wall of their domicile; and, subsequently mud to plaster the apartment, or grass to line it withal. It was framed beyond the reach of man, so prying eyes could not look into it; but oh! the song when the day's work was done! It was then that we discovered that our blackbirds were grateful. They gave us the best of what they possessed in return for shelter, food, and that first benefit; and gave it in so unusual a place that everybody wondered.

We were grateful in return to the stable-boys on the other side the wall for not molesting them, though they probably would if they could have got at them in safety; but our eyes were upon them, and boys in those days were not quite so aggressive as they are in these: they still retained some respect for their elders. In short, they did

not rifle the blackbirds' nest. It must be confessed they would have found it break-neck work, for there was neither hold for foot nor ladder in our tall ivy bush.

It was curious that the birds should have chosen a spot so surrounded by human beings and in the heart of a town ; but neither the noisy talk of the stable-yard nor the quieter movements of the frequenters of the garden disturbed them. They built their nest, laid their eggs, hatched their young, and finally reared them.

Of the latter fact there was no doubt ; for one very fine day we espied a party of six blackbirds, large and small, pecking or learning to peck such food as either nature or ourselves had provided for them. The parent birds were giving their fledgelings their first lesson in self-reliance and self-preservation. The corners of turf that peeped out from amongst the flower-beds were scarcely large enough for such a family party ; but they accommodated themselves to their surroundings, which was setting a good example to their neighbours.

But the earth must be replenished, and men and blackbirds are desirous of change. Parents, too, are ambitious for their offspring, and anxious to see them make a start in life.

Our blackbirds started theirs, we suppose, in the big garden, whither they encouraged them to wing their first flight ; and they also made many efforts in the little one. The young brood finally disappeared ; not so the old birds. They never forsook us, and we were gladdened by their presence and song year after year.

How long do blackbirds live? We quitted the house with the miniature garden long ago, but have been since told that a pair of blackbirds visit it periodically, and that they are called by our name.

Was it gratitude or greed that caused these birds to give us of their best—their song and their progeny? And we ask the same question in regard to another incident occurring in the same garden, in connection with their natural enemy, a cat.

This was the wildest of forsaken cats, that nobody could tame. How or where she lived and had managed to grow from kittenhood to cathood was a marvel to us all. She was a lean, lank tortoise-shell, with hungry eyes, limp whiskers and long, thin tail. If you looked at her when she chanced to appear, she vanished over the wall like a flash of lightning. Such a wretched, hunted creature could but call forth one's pity, and pity in John Bull's eyes means food.

So we placed food in the most remote corner of the little garden, under the ivied wall, just opposite the blackbirds' ivy-bush. Naturally, other cats scented it, and ate it ; but we ruthlessly hunted them off, and had at last the satisfaction of seeing the poor outcast furtively devouring the meal.

As time went on she came pretty regularly for the food ; not by day, but in the evening, as if reassured by the gathering shadows. She was unmolested, but by no means tamed. We had a handmaid

of somewhat cold manners but warm heart, who became interested in the process. Sly saucers of milk were placed nearer the house, but with no effect. She was not to be enticed into human society. The mere sight of the "face divine" was effectual in sending her off.

We suddenly found, however, that she took to frequenting the ivy that grew above her dining-room. We shrewdly suspected that she made of it a sleeping apartment. At any rate, she was safe there, for the wall was high. But we had not anticipated results.

One fine morning we saw our wild friend force her way out of her ivied chamber with a kitten in her mouth. She descended the wall, placed the burden in her dining-room, and re-ascended at a bound. She came out again with another kitten, which she carefully laid near its brother, or sister, as might be. A third was brought out into the light of day from its leafy birthplace, and the three miserable little creatures were literally heaped up, if not on our doorstep, not very far from it. Three city Arabs all at once! What could we do with them?

The mother leapt upon the wall again, and surveyed her offspring from that vantage-ground. She had brought them into a troublesome world, and had done the best she could for them, and had, at the same time, like the blackbirds, shown her grateful sense of bounties received by presenting them to her benefactors.

The sun poured his rays upon them, and we felt sure they would lose their sight. But they were blind already—not "three blind mice," but three blind kittens. We laid them on a piece of carpet; we provided meat and milk for their affectionate parent; we did our best. Self-preservation was stronger than instinct in the maternal breast, and we are compelled to acknowledge that the wild mother did not pay much attention to her young. Happily for her and us, they died speedy but natural deaths, and were consigned to an untimely grave in, we fear, the ash-pit. She evidently believed that we should do for them what we had done for her, and presented them to us accordingly.

After their demise she was either tamed or disconsolate, for she actually ventured to descend the steps that led from garden to door. By degrees she took her food in the little court, then—Oh! proud moment in the life of our Betsy!—actually walked into the kitchen. There she remained henceforth, a kitchen cat.

She did not favour the parlour much, though she would occasionally peep in. She learnt to purr and fawn and rub her face against us, and to behave much like other cats. The shrew was tamed.

But she still hated boys, and looked on them as red-handed assassins. At the same time she was herself a red-pawed assassin; for she killed our rats and mice like the grateful beast she was. She even slew a monster rat that used to walk up and down our attic-stairs with the heavy footfall of a man, and had been seen taking a solemn constitutional right round the garden.

At first we believed this rat to be a robber, which he certainly was; then he became a ghost, and Betsy was afraid to mount to the attic. But one night she met him bodily on the stairs, and had she encountered an inmate of another world her screams could not have been more fearful. He appeared to us occasionally, and we grew rather interested in him, wondering at his great thud, thud, as he prowled about at night. A rat's tread is only to be compared to that of a person with rheumatism in his feet: at least, when he walks up and down stairs.

But ours was "the cat that killed the rat," and she watched him buried in the grave that had entombed her own small family. In times of war, enemies occasionally sleep the last sleep together, and a perpetual warfare goes on between cats and rats.

Is there anyone obtuse enough to refuse to see that the cat and blackbird were grateful? In return for small favours, they gave us all they had; they even brought us their small families in proof of their gratitude! Doubtless many a poor person would thankfully do the same.

THE VANISHING YEAR.

Born in rejoicing and cradled in hope,
  Pointing new paths for adventurous feet,
Promising power with the future to cope,
  Whispering low of the summer-time sweet,
Camest thou hither. Now nearing thy bier,
What dost thou leave us, O vanishing year?

Joy was not seldom o'ershadowed by grief;
  Hope's soaring pinion salt tears have bedight;
Sometimes the road forced a sigh for relief;
  Often did weakness turn back from the fight;
Summer but lives as a memory dear—
What dost thou leave us, O vanishing year?

Little, ah, little the harvest we know,
  We who seek treasure where treasure is none;
Wind-tossed and rain-kissed, we let the fruit go,
  Eager that perishing flowers may be won;
Murmuring sadly when these disappear—
What dost thou leave us, O vanishing year?

Haply had sorrow a mission of love;
  Black disappointment taught wisdom at length;
Weary, we learned to find comfort above;
  Beaten, we trusted no more in our strength.
Then, though its value be reckoned not here,
Gracious thy guerdon, O vanishing year!

Sydney Grey.

ISABELLE'S WAITING.

By Miss Betham-Edwards.

PROLOGUE.

A HEART-BREAKING task had fallen to the share of a young French officer stationed in Algeria.

His friend and comrade, the versatile, affectionate, enthusiastic military engineer, Raoul Rivière, lay dead of sunstroke in the adjoining room; his funeral was to take place at sunset.

Meanwhile, with all possible dispatch, his goods and chattels were now to be packed for transmission to France. The young man's eyes were red with weeping, and every object around but heightened his grief: the pianette the accomplished musician contrived to carry wherever he went, the dashing water-colour sketches with which he had adorned his walls, the small case of books in French, English, and Italian, each giving evidence of fastidious literary taste, the numerous little works of art collected during his travels.

This poor lodging in a semi-French, semi-Arab town, on the borders of the Great Sahara, was a tiny temple dedicated to beauty. A few years ago nothing easier than to recall Haroun-El-Raschid in out of the way spots of French Africa. Every piece of furniture was here a gem of Eastern art or handicraft, from the antique lamp fastened to the ceiling, to the mellow-tinted carpets, work of Moorish weavers not as yet vitiated by orders from Manchester.

These rich and lovely things were now ownerless, and as the young Captain removed each from its place with loving hands his tears fell afresh. Once or twice he quitted his post to enter the inner room, and there, drawing aside the cerecloths, gaze on the face of his dead friend.

"For this were we born!" he murmured, contrasting the scene before him with the recollection of two days before. Then those rigid hands had glided over the keys making the place alive with music; those eyes, now closed for ever, had beamed with intensest enjoyment of life; from those pale blue lips had fallen flashes of wit, happy conceits, suggestions all his own. A few hours later, and even the little left of this glorious young career would have vanished. A stone crucifix recording name, birth and demise, in a spot on the outskirts of civilization, would preserve the memory of Raoul Rivière —for whom?

"It is hard, too hard," mused the survivor, fortunately having scant leisure for grief. With rough tenderness and soldierly precision he continued his business, soon turning the elegant little room into chaos and desolation.

All was finished in time for the last sad scene. It is not easy to lend anything like pomp to a military funeral under such circumstances, but perhaps this one seemed less sordid to outsiders than to the solitary mourner. Why such indecent haste and sacrilegious bustle, such poverty of ceremonial and cold routine?

Priest, acolyte and chorister boys now hurried towards the death-chamber, a crumpled white cloth was thrown over the denuded dressing table, two wax candles were lighted, then with indecorous swiftness and unconcern, the preliminary prayers were got through. The tawdriness of the preparations, the soiled robe of the officiating priest, the dingy vestments of the assistants, hastily flung over their ordinary working apparel, the utter absence of solemnity and feeling, gave the Captain a keener pang than even the realisation of his friend's death. More hastily than words can describe, the coffin was now fastened down, a tattered, faded Tricolour used as a pall, on it the young officer's uniform was folded, and six bronzed French soldiers in Zouave costume put their shoulders to the burden.

Without, had gathered a motley little crowd, their deep-hued complexions and gay dresses conspicuous in the glow of wondrous sunset. On the opposite side of the road a detachment of shabby-looking soldiery, headed by their commandant, awaited the body. Bedouin children, beautiful as angels, impudent as Parisian gamins, clung to the lintels, only prevented from making a rush within in hopes of petty plunder by the Zouaves keeping guard above; with arms akimbo and expressions of mingled curiosity and contempt, stared Arabs, here glowering with the fierceness of the desert; mingled with these, Jews, Negroes and Kabyles, the graduated scale of complexion varying from deepest olive and walnut brown to jet black.

Priest and acolyte, not too reverentially received, made unceremonious way through the rabble; and the Captain, hastily donning sword and képi, following coffin and bearers, came last. Noisily turning the key and pocketing it with a meaning look at the would-be pilferers, he joined his chief outside; then, muffled drums and mournful music sounding, the little procession moved off, followed by picturesque stragglers.

A wilder scene could hardly be imagined; never, certes, did Christian burial take place under stranger, more savage circumstances.

As the funeral train gradually wound upwards from the street, a wide, monotonous, yet grandiose panorama opened to view.

Far as the eye could reach stretched sweep upon sweep of steppe, apparently interminable threshold of the interminable desert. Beyond these plateaux of waving grass and reeds, hundreds of thousands of acres as yet held in undisputed possession by the Bedouin, lay the great Sahara, itself no more of a mystery than the bordering trackless wastes, all of subdued yet resplendent tints in brown and gold.

This evening an intense effulgence filled heaven and earth, the sky of pure amber, the wilderness showing ripples of orange and purple on

the umbered surface. Here sheep pasturing in the foreground looked like little lumps of rich gold; there the dark tents of the shepherd broke the brown uniformity.

Contrasted with the landscape, wild, romantic, and lovely as any ever ready to the painter's hand, was the little town, a congeries of nondescript buildings without pretensions either to grace, hygiene or comfort. Low one-storied tenements of Jew or negro vendors, Moorish dwellings presenting a blank, white, windowless wall to the street; French cabarets with the usual green shutters, oleanders and pomegranates in pots, round tables before the door; a formal, brand-new barrack, from which waved the Tricolour; a church equally new and unattractive. That was all.

Beyond the little suburban boulevard, on a hillside fronting the great plateaux and the desert, lay the cemetery, of a few years' date only, nevertheless sprinkled with cheap wooden crosses painted blue and grey, and hung with black and white or yellow wreaths. Here and there were new-made graves, piled with huge stones, defences against the ghoul-like jackals and hyenas, midnight depredators in the sacred enclosure.

Faint atmosphere of sacredness seemed to hover about the place in the eyes of the sullen, dry-eyed mourner. He wept for his lost comrade no longer, sentiment were here wholly out of keeping. The commandant wore an absent look of regret, he could but mourn the premature death of so gifted and promising a soldier; his men were subdued also, the same fate might befall any one of themselves to-morrow. As to the other spectators, they testified no more emotion than if the horse of the young military engineer, instead of its owner, were about to be laid to final rest.

Next morning, weary, dispirited, out of heart with his lot, the Captain was sipping his coffee, when a tap at the door aroused him.

"My Captain," said the intruder, the military servant of his dead friend, "after we had nailed down the cases and cleared my master's room last night, we found this behind the piano."

Here he produced a sketch book.

"As the luggage had to be despatched at daybreak, I thought it best to bring the book to you. You will see it is of no value, only a few daubs. You will do as you think fit about sending it to France, the commandant says."

"Thank you, my good Jean. Here," the young man said, giving the bearer a two-franc piece. The sight of the album and the feeling that it was his own cheered his dreary mood. The sketches might be of the hastiest, they would give his friend's impressions, however fugitive; recollections of happy, vivid moments. The posthumous gift seemed in some degree to soften the bitterness of parting. The sight of the water-colour drawings would not only bring back the sketcher's moods, but also something of himself. With a sob rising to his throat, he opened the volume.

The first two or three leaves were turned with careless sadness. He was hardly in the humour to admire, much less to criticise; but he soon found his attention riveted by the strange, almost unearthly beauty of the scenes portrayed—scenes unreal in the sense of being utterly unlike anything familiar to him, at the same time informed with the realism of natural beauty. A cursory glance convinced him that every one of the fairy-like sites had been beheld by the eye, and were no mere phantasies of poetic imagination run riot.

The pictures were evidently a series, illustrating different phases and aspects of the same place. The beholder hardly knew which was most bewildering, the ethereal beauty of outline, or colour.

It was a city exquisite as Venice, but without her lagunes; perfect as Athens, yet towering over no blue Ægean; august as Granada, although no Vega lay stretched at its feet.

The silhouettes, airy, graceful, colossal, proclaimed no especial civilization, whilst the prevailing tints, delicate blue greys and purest azure, indicated a transparence of atmosphere equally hard to identify. This mysterious metropolis seemed to possess a climate as well as an architecture of its own. The columns, towers, and pinnacles of silvery amethystine hue were interspersed with hanging gardens, lawny spaces and bosquets of dazzling gold green; the very citadel and lines of outer fortifications were tapestried with verdure. And skilfully indeed had the artist caught the translucence and limpidity of the light and the subdued brilliance of the pile: raised by whom? for whom?

This strange, yet real city appeared to be utterly unpeopled; nowhere could the eye detect sign of life or animation; no sentry patrolled the battlements, no citizens thronged the market-place, no children disported in the squares.

Was it some place on which a curse had fallen, some capital edified in strength and beauty, afterwards found unfit for habitation?

Fascinated, spell-bound, the Captain searched in vain for any hint of identification. But none was to be found. Not a name, not a date was pencilled on the margin; odd that his friend should never so much as have alluded to this experience, have allowed such a souvenir to gather dust behind a piano!

He mused and mused without being able to arrive at any satisfactory conclusion. The young military engineer had travelled in France and the Algerian colonies, but not elsewhere that he knew of, and no recollections of his own helped him to an identification of the site. Did it indeed possess a local habitation and a name? Was it, after all, the mere conjuring up of imagtnation?

Another solution offered itself. Raoul Rivière, without being in the least degree superstitious, had possessed a morbid inclination for the weird and the marvellous. Certain impressions and experiences he seldom alluded to, because of their very intensity. Might not this mysterious city be connected in his mind with thoughts, dreams, or

events, too solemn for confidence? Perhaps it was connected with some page of his own history! Again, the friendship so precious to both had been of a few months' standing only. Whilst much was told on either side, much, doubtless, remained to tell.

Whatever the nature of the riddle, the Captain determined to solve it, if, indeed, solution were possible. For days, nay, weeks, the mysterious sketches occupied his thoughts, when, quite unexpectedly, his regiment was ordered back to France.

I.

Barely twelve months before, André had brought his bride home, and never adoring husband wore a sadder face. This blue-eyed, comely, not unprosperous young peasant, wedded for dear love's sake rather than for worldly considerations, was slowly awaking from a delusively fair dream.

His peerless Isabelle, the beautiful, spirited girl, transplanted from a bright, animated southern town to this remote region, drooped like a flower in uncongenial soil. All had welcomed her kindly: the grandmother and grand-aunts, the widowed, disabled uncle, the somewhat uncouth young brothers; but her persistent waywardness—so all regarded it—was gradually transforming these new-made relations into enemies. How should he bear it if the whole household turned against his darling, and worse still, she turned against himself?

It was a superb morning of late summer, and in cool, delicious tints of blue and grey stood out every feature of the wild landscape, a veritable bit of desert eerie in unfamiliar eyes. Yet in those of its youthful possessor, common-place enough! André had been reared amid these solitudes. Neither when covered by the snowy pall of the Siberian winter, nor amid the blinding glare and barrenness of harvest-time, did this stern yet matchless nature awe or terrify him. Truth to tell, the real spirit of the place had never entered his soul. The rigid climate of these lofty limestone table-lands and ungrateful soil were accepted by him as matters of course. Only for his young wife's sake did he now wish everything changed; in sight, a neat village, pleasant meadows, babbling brooks, peach and olive orchards, roses and oleanders, as in her native Aveyron.

The country was the strangest conceivable; as yet a terra incognita even to native geographers.

Yon gloomy heights, rising like mountains from the plain, are no mountains indeed, but the lofty steppes of Central France, or Causses, so-called; a name unintelligible except in their immediate vicinity. As dread giants keeping watch over the portals of the world towered the dread Causse Noir and the hardly less formidable Causse Méjean, their broad summits on a level with the peaks of the distant Cévennes, their dark flanks running perpendicularly to the level below.

Opposite, the horizon was bounded by blue ranges, the far-off chains of the Cantal and Auvergne, whilst nearer rose the purple shadow of what seemed a majestic castellated city. This Nineveh of the desert—Babylon of the trackless waste—was the most conspicuous feature of a landscape unrivalled throughout France.

From far and wide its grandiose silhouette could be discerned, now lightsome, golden, airy as the summer cloudage above, now sombre and frowning as the Causses, its neighbours. And nothing could be more solitary or steppe-like than the wilderness separating them; not a spire, not a roof in sight; only wave upon wave of stony undulation; here and there a few sheep browsing on the scant herbage, or a patch of bright green rye or potatoes breaking the grey monotony.

In the midst of this enormous panorama, solitary as an eagle's nest in the cliffs, and as hard to find to the uninitiated, lay the young farmer's homestead, no smiling abode, certainly, for a fastidious, town-bred bride.

The house was a straggling, whitewashed, barn-like building, only approached from the high road, miles away, by a cart-track or traverse winding amid the rocks. The pedestrian would come all at once upon the gardenless, graceless place; close to the front door, a dung-hill; over against these the farm-yard, cattle-stalls and pig-styes, the poultry walking uninvited into the large, smoke-browned kitchen. The construction was solid, and from October to May a wood fire blazed on the hearth. The pot was ever replenished with flesh and fowl; from the ceiling hung huge flitches of bacon; the ancient oak presses were piled with coarse home-spun linen. Home-made liqueurs and jellies stood on the cupboard shelf. These and other evidences of well-being were not calculated to satisfy the aspirations of a girl accustomed to mirrors, pet birds in gilded cages, carpets and other luxuries.

It was Sunday, but no tinkle of church bells could be heard against these wastes. Life at the farm went on as usual, the only difference being that a piece of meat was spitted before the fire, less activity reigned without and within, one and all drowsed in winter and strolled abroad in summer. "If there were only a church within reach!" oft-times sighed Isabelle.

The nearest hamlet lay five miles off, and church-going was therefore impracticable during eight months of the year on account of the snow. A ten-mile walk under ordinary circumstances were no impossible feat, even to a town-bred maiden; but the greater part of the way lay across a scorching, unsheltered plain, the sharp pebbles laming the feet, and the rays of the sun pouring down blindingly. No mass meant no real Sunday; in other words, no putting on of best clothes or saunter with neighbours, bands playing, pedlars' stalls glittering, cafés inviting to lemonade and cakes.

The weird beauty of the scene, the inexpressibly exhilarating air,

the wealth of field flowers around, might have offered compensation to some minds; on this especial morning even André drank in cheerfulness with the promise of the day, and felt that Isabelle must do so too. After a turn round the farm-yard—on his younger brothers, Charles and Jean, devolved the duty of feeding the cattle and poultry—he re-entered the kitchen.

Two ancient women, still adhering to the costume of the country, sat on low, three-cornered stools, ladling out their morning soup. Almost witch-like was their appearance, their high black head-dresses and stiff bodices, after the manner of stays, recalling local fashions of a hundred years before.

"Where is Isabelle?" asked the young man, as he helped himself to a plateful of soup and sat down by the pair.

"Where is Isabelle?" scornfully repeated the great-aunt, the elder and severer of the two sisters. "Listen, André, your conduct is not that of a man. It is spiritless, idiotic, to put up with such behaviour from a wife; a girl, too, who did not bring you so much as a half-penny."

"There is no harm in lying abed an hour later on Sunday," rejoined the grandmother. "The day is long enough, Heaven knows! But 'tis so all the week. Your wife is crueller to herself than to you, my poor André. Look at her pale cheeks. She is fretting herself into the grave."

"And for what?" put in the other, perhaps with pardonable viciousness. "Because she has the best husband ever girl was blest with, a good home, plenty to eat and drink—bah! it makes me sick, these whims and fancies. Pluck up your spirit, André; speak out as a man, a husband, should!"

Just then a woman's gown rustled on the bare staircase, and Isabelle entered the kitchen.

No greeting passed between the young wife and her husband's relations. The two old women went on with their soup, never once looking up, whilst Isabelle sulkily received her portion from André's hands.

She was a strikingly handsome girl, with the beautiful features and rich colouring of the South, but a veritable Cinderella in the matter of personal appearance. Her splendid hair was slipping from the comb, her black stuff gown was blue with age and sadly needed a darn here and there; the very genius of a Frenchwoman, instinctive, exquisite neatness, found among all ranks, was wholly wanting. She seemed to delight in obscuring the radiant loveliness with which she had been endowed: glorious eyes and complexion, faultlessly-shaped nose and mouth, perfect little teeth, and a slender, graceful figure.

As she swallowed her soup, André watched her narrowly. His grandmother's words made him more anxious than ever. Was his Isabelle really pining away, really ill? He noticed that her complexion wanted its usual glow, and that her ugly black dress hung more loosely than ever about the light, girlish limbs. She had grown

quieter, too, of late, less aggressive towards the grandmother and grand aunt, more forbearing with the young brothers. What did these signs mean?

Just then, the pair of hobbledehoys entered, good-looking, well-meaning young fellows, but apt to tease their unsympathetic, at times haughty, sister-in-law.

"We are going to the fair," began Charles defiantly, keeping his eye fixed on Jean.

"We are going to the fair," repeated Jean in the same tone of determination.

Like dogs these two ever concerted mischief in company, relying on each other's support for the carrying out of their plans.

"Young men used to go to mass o' Sundays when I was a girl," put in the grand-aunt, "and save their money instead of spending it on peep-shows and low company."

"Why not wait till the hay is got in?" added the grandmother. "What good will you two be to-morrow after walking to Millau and back?"

André glanced at the pensive figure of Isabelle.

"The young horse has done little or no work this week. I've a mind to drive to the fair, if Isabelle would like to go," he said.

Isabelle shook her head, whereupon the two younger men imitated the gesture with peals of laughter.

"That is Isabelle's way," began Charles, the livelier and more malicious of the two. "And so it would be at the fair. Will you have a turn in the merry-go-round? Shake of the head. Will you have some gingerbread? Shake of the head number two. Will you walk, sit down, stay a little longer, or go straight home? Shake of the head."

Jean was about to continue his brother's mimicry when André ended the scene: yielding, affectionate, good-natured as he was, he seldom asserted his authority except when Isabelle's name was dragged into a family dispute.

"Look you," he said. "A single syllable more and I'll lock you both in the empty stable till nightfall. Unmannerly cubs that you are. 'Tis a mercy you will both have to go off in a year a'soldiering."

Both culprits hung their heads abashed, and the ancient women held their peace. André might be right or wrong, but he was here indisputably the master. Their basins of soup emptied, the lads stole away to prepare for the day's expedition. The old ladies busied themselves with housework. The husband and wife were left alone.

II.

He eyed her anxiously as physician some precious patient, and at last asked in the gentlest voice:

"Why won't you go to the fair with me? Why will you say no to everything I propose?"

The girl's beautiful head was bowed sullenly; without looking up, she jerked out a wilful reply.

"Take no notice of me; I cannot change myself. And you know what I said on our wedding-day. I would be happy with you if I could. It is not my fault if I am wretched here."

The young man's candid blue eyes filled with tears. Yes, he remembered those words but too well. The misprized, orphaned, portionless Isabelle had accepted his love, his name, his fortunes with the cold promise—she would be happy with him if she could. And for a few brief, to him inexpressibly exquisite, weeks the pact was kept. His unsparing devotion and self sacrifice in little things were rewarded by gaiety, liking, even affection. She was evidently learning to love him and be happy, when a sudden, inexplicable change occurred. That sparkling, winning apparition, who had even obtained favour in the eyes of the stern grand-dames, and rough homage from her young brothers-in-law, vanished as completely as if the earth had swallowed her up. In her place there moved a pale, drooping, self-centred figure, mute as a mother bereft of her first-born, dejected as maiden whose lover lies in the tomb.

"You mope too much indoors," he went on. "You should get all the fresh air you can whilst the fine weather lasts. Come, fetch your hat. Let us take a turn together."

Isabelle obeyed mechanically.

It was no summer world to her, but assent seemed easier than discussion. They set off in silence. A comelier pair it were hard to find on a French Sunday. If André's face lacked the brilliant colouring and subtle charm of her Southern type, it offered more candour and sweetness of expression. There was a fine glow of health about his sunburnt complexion, whilst his eyes, of deep, soft blue, showed child-like ingenuousness and trust. The features were regular, as is generally the case in these regions, and the form manly, symmetrical and well knit.

These youthful figures, so well matched in point of age, beauty, and social condition, should have made the joyfullest picture imaginable; in reality, none could be sadder. A burden of care weighed down the husband's naturally buoyant spirits, whilst the wife looked as one who felt herself under a curse, doomed to suffer and cause suffering without fault of her own. They walked side by side, downcast and spiritless.

"We will have a look at the city," he said.

"Oh, André, why go there?" she exclaimed, with an expression of indescribable shrinking.

"Whither then?" was the careless rejoinder.

Whither, indeed? Here were no green lanes or umbrageous meadows, no olive groves or peach orchards by meandering streams as in her own sunny Aveyron. Instead, the dark, frowning Causses, the rocky and waterless wilderness, and the Eldritch—the accursed city.

Following a narrow path across potato fields and patches of buckwheat and rye, they were soon in the midst of a stony, flowery, absolutely unpeopled waste.

The farm-buildings were now hidden by masses of rock rising on every side, no longer mere stones to be wrenched by the ploughman, but huge columnar piles recalling the mystic alleys of Carnac and Stonehenge. Here and there the grey surface was tapestried with dazzlingly brilliant green which, with the wreath of wild flowers around, softened the prevailing savagery. Everywhere abounded the wild lavender, its delicious fragrance filling the air, the colour of its silvery spikes in perfect harmony with the rocks.

Strange and beautiful as was this scene, crags sparkling as crystal, verdure bright as gold, lavendered sweeps, and far away and around the towering Causses and the Cévennes, it but formed the prelude of witchery to come.

Plodding along for another quarter of an hour, now across a bit of ploughed land, now over stony pasture, the tremendous shadow of the Eldritch city straight before them, they suddenly found themselves under its very walls: above, hanging gardens, domes, pinnacles and battlements; around, vistas of street and public promenade; the whole of lustrous silvery rock, shining against a warm, southern sky.

"Take my hand, my girl," said André, "and let us clamber to yonder terrace. The air is good to breathe there."

Tired of perpetual resistance, Isabelle obeyed; André, agile as Tyrolese goatherd, helping her up the giddy stair.

Huge blocks of limestone here met, with yawning fissures and break-neck clefts between. The task of bestriding these chasms, so full of danger to a stranger, was mere child's play to the young farmer. Isabelle clung to him, and in a few minutes later, breathless and heated, they reached a grassy platform, high as cathedral spire above the level. What a scene here met their unbewildered, irresponsive eyes! The broad earth could show none fairer.

Familiar lines and harmonies were here replaced by forms and tints of unimaginable airiness and delicacy. Nothing, not even the turf carpeting the untrodden ways recalled the world of every day. The very heavens seemed to possess a new, indescribable transparence and loveliness, whilst proudly rising under the golden and sapphire canopy stood a city more beautiful than any reared by mortal hands.

It covered an enormous area this metropolis of the waste. Perched on their lofty pinnacle, the two careless beholders could now obtain a bird's-eye view of the whole. In the pearly, translucent atmosphere, every object was clear and distinct, citadel and domes, watch-towers and portals, all of wondrous lightsomeness and grace; the untarnished silveriness of the building stone in striking contrast with the matchless azure of the sky and gem-like green. There were natural gardens everywhere, flower-beds, bosquets, lawny spaces, town and

country so blended that each citizen had forest greenery at his very doors. A stranger thrown suddenly amid these scenes must have conceived design here—could not have set down the whole as a natural phenomenon. How exquisite, would be the first thought of such a beholder, to inhabit a place planned, we might fancy, for a race gifted with finer perceptions than our own. Or, to indulge another phantasy, were these crystal domes, lightsome mansions, airy arcades, built by some fellow-mortal, believer in the realisation of perfect beauty, high priest of the ideal? No dreams or speculations could seem extravagant or out of keeping.

It was Sunday, but the silence of perpetual Sabbath ever reigned within these precincts. Not a sound broke the eerie stillness: tomb-like desolateness prevailed from end to end.

On this visible fairyland the pair gazed in sullen, brooding sadness. André was wishing all the time that these stately piles could be razed to the ground, and in their place rise crops of corn and potatoes. Isabelle sat with fixed, wistful eyes, trying to see nothing.

"André," she said at last, "why do you stay here? Sell your share of the farm to Charles and Jean, and let us go elsewhere."

"The lads are minors as yet, and what would the grandmother and grand-aunt do without me?" André replied, not so much taken aback by the proposition as she expected. "Besides, who would buy a heap of stones like that?"

And he pointed, almost despairingly, to the superb spectacle before them.

"I won't say what I may do by and by," he went on. "When my brothers are men, and we have only ourselves to think about, I mean. I am not fonder of this place than you are. But it came to me from my father: I have lived in it all my life. If you were only cheerful, I should not envy the President of the Republic himself."

A remorseful expression came into the girl's face as she listened to this speech, not made in anger, but with the quiet pathos of one accustomed to suffer in silence. She averted her head, unable to endure that look of deep, uncomplaining sorrow, and seemed to debate in herself.

"Why do you brood always, and refuse to take pleasure in anything?" the young man went on, determined to take this opportunity of speaking out. "I do not allow anyone to be unkind to you. Our life is no harder than other people's."

"Listen, André," broke in Isabelle, with a look of desperate resolve. "I will tell you the truth; why it is that I would rather be laid in my grave to-morrow than live on here. The place is under a curse."

"So the country folks say. The demon city they have even called these rocks," André replied, ruefully, "and a city they look like. I could swear yonder pile were a ruined watch-tower, such as every city in France can show, and the blocks around, what else do they look like than flat-roofed houses?"

Whilst he glanced curiously around, Isabelle nerved herself to continue.

"The country folks are right. It is an accursed spot, André, and the curse has fallen on me."

The words were hardly out of her lips, he had not caught their full import, when his quick eye discerned two figures moving in the distance.

"Look straight ahead," he cried; "do you see those specks of red and blue? As I live, we have company here to-day. It is some officer with a peasant to show him the way to Millau."

Isabelle's glance followed his own. Yes, the crimson blotch indicated beyond doubt a soldier's uniform, and the bit of blue a goatherd's blouse. The pair were carefully escalading the rocks that might be described as the outworks of the citadel, nearly half a mile off.

To André, the surprise meant but a rare incident, he watched the strangers' movements with curiosity only. Isabelle became greatly agitated. On a sudden, the grassy platform, lodged in mid-air as a balloon, seemed to glide from under her, the glittering panorama swayed beneath her unsteady gaze; for one terrible moment she felt about to be precipitated to the depth below. Deathly pale, trembling in every limb, she clutched at the tufts of wild rosemary within reach, crying faintly for help.

André, who had been watching the strangers on the edge of the rock, was at her side swift as lightning.

"I did not know that you were subject to giddiness," he said, self-reproachfully; "hold fast to me. We will get down at once."

The task was no easy one. Although robust and well-proportioned, he could not be called a rustic athlete, he dared not now shoulder her as many a mountaineer would have done with hardly an effort. How, then, to manage the descent? In bestriding these chasms, a single false step might end in direst injury to both.

No help was within call, not a drop of water within reach. There remained nothing to do but rally her drooping spirits, and brace her for the attempt.

"Come," he said with forced cheerfulness. "Remember that you are mistress of my house. You must make haste and prepare for those gentlemen yonder, they are sure to stop at the farm and want breakfast."

His words gave Isabelle a certain artificial courage. She sprang to her feet and declared herself ready for the venture.

"Now keep your eyes fixed on the sky, don't look down at all," said the young man. "One foot here, one there; hold my hand tight; that is my brave girl. Why, the worst is half over and you are already looking yourself again."

The momentary vertigo was indeed over. When they reached the first landing-place and paused to take breath, Isabelle's pallor had left her. She peered unshrinkingly into the deep, narrow chasms still to be bridged over.

"You are very good to me, my poor André," she murmured.

"Nonsense," was the almost indifferent reply. Her apathy and coldness had driven all sentiment out of him long ago.

Passionately as he loved her still, there was an aloofness about the feeling that made him appear at times apathetic and cold too. He worshipped the Isabelle who had been his bride, not the Isabelle who shared his hearth and home.

Another strained effort or two, the next and less hazardous stages were passed; finally, safe and sound, but flushed and panting, they found themselves again at the starting point—on either side the lavendered waste, high above the sheeny battlements just climbed, before them the labyrinthine streets of the rock-built city.

"You are quite well again? Then I will go and look for the strangers, and do you make haste to the farm. Lay the cloth for breakfast and prepare—well, everything you can think of. These officers have large appetites and are very generous. You will be well rewarded for your pains."

Flushed and eager, with the strangest look in her eyes, Isabelle set off, promising to do her best. André boldly plunged into the stone alleys and arcades, all silent and deserted as a mausoleum.

III.

Lightly as a fawn and wildly exultant, Isabelle sprang over the sweet-scented waste. A brief moment had served to transform her. The look of restlessness, apathy and dreary introspection passed completely away. Instead, the light of joyfulness indescribable beamed in her eyes, happy looking-forward lent brightness to her cheek, the beautiful lips were parted in a smile, and no subterfuge was necessary on reaching home. The prospect of unexpectedly earning a few francs quite accounted for such changed humour to the grandmother and grand-aunt.

"Shall we help you, child?" they asked, wishing in their hearts that the double windfall would happen every day—Isabelle bustling and happy and extra money earned without trouble.

"I can do things so much best alone, thank you," was the somewhat ungracious but alert reply, as the young housewife set about her preparations. With extraordinary dispatch, even in a Frenchwoman, an ample, if homely, breakfast was soon in progress: cabbage and bacon simmered gently in the earthen pot on the blazing wood fire; in another, placed amid the hot ashes, potatoes piled to the brim were being cooked to perfection in their own steam, a spitted fowl sent up savoury vapour, whilst new-laid eggs and freshly gathered chervil were in readiness for the never absent omelette.

Next she very neatly laid the cloth, getting out the finest home-spun table linen, the new cutlery André had won in a raffle at Florac, the little liqueur glasses of rose-coloured crystal with gilt edges, the

coffee cups of pure white Limoges, gifts to him on his wedding-day. Wild flowers are seldom used by French working folks for decorative purposes, or she might have gathered splendid posies by the way. Flower garden there was none, but the beauty-craving Isabelle bethought her of the pomegranate tree, which, with a couple of pink oleanders in tubs, stood on the sunny side of the house, strangely contrasted with their sordid surroundings. Like Isabelle herself, they seemed a dream of beauty amid unsightliness and squalor.

Risking the indignation of the ancient women, she now cut off two or three sprays of the gorgeous blossom, which, in a cheap vase of plain blown glass, wonderfully embellished the table.

Lastly, she made her own toilette.

The grand-dames slept in a small dark room abutting on the kitchen, the lads in a bare attic, whilst the young husband and wife occupied a comparatively comfortable chamber overlooking the farm-yard. It had brick floors, and little in the way of furniture but a handsome bedstead and clothes press of dark stained oak. Carpets, curtains, and other luxuries had not as yet been thought of. The large press, however, contained vast quantities of home-spun, home-made linen, besides the Sunday clothes that transformed this Cinderella of the waste into a princess. Whenever she put on one of her best gowns, even the uncouth Jean and Charles were awed into bluntly expressed admiration.

Here she very carefully braided her splendid hair, and brought out a curious gold-green gown, of no expensive stuff, yet having an absolutely regal look amid such surroundings. With a little sigh of mingled rapture and deprecation, much as if the dress were some evil sprite to be prayed over, some unholy influence to be exorcised, she slipped off her rusty bombazine and drew around her the dazzling, silky folds. The metamorphosis was startling. Beautiful as she had been in her squalor, she now looked like a queen made ready for splendid pageant. Nothing could have better set off her rich, Southern beauty than these shifting, lizard-like tints of warm green and deep gold, the soft stuff falling gracefully as spun silk. A little necklet of filagree gold, earrings to match, and a white, lace-bordered kerchief completed the toilette; then, the last touch added, she sank into a chair listening breathlessly.

How the moments dragged! There came no sound to mark the wane of time, no church bell called the pious to mass, no town clock noted the passing hours. Only the cackling of hens and the quacking of ducks close under her window and the crooning of the grand-dames in the kitchen broke the stillness. The wide waste was silent as the cloudland above, as silent and as unpeopled. Oh, this tomb-like, unearthly silence, thought Isabelle. Were there only street noises and signs of life abroad, she could shake off the spell that bound her, and be careless with the rest. At last she heard quick footsteps and voices outside, and her heart stood still.

They—*he*—had come back!

Swiftly, surprisingly, as in dreams, now passed before her mind's eye the one day of her life that had been life indeed. She saw before her the glorious being whose words had seemed inspiration, whose eyes had penetrated her very soul, whose presence and way of looking at things transported into a wholly new world. They were again sitting together on the outskirts of the phantom city, that evening wrapped in roseate clouds, and she was listening to his impassioned utterances, the wondrous panorama, the golden cloudlet, even the field flower, lending to his speech the spell of poetry. At first the impersonation of joy, every word, look and gesture expressing intensest enjoyment of life, he had saddened before parting. "And you," he said, gazing on her with deep yet sorrowful admiration, "you are strange and beautiful as your surroundings. Tell me, are you happy here?"

That terrible question, asked perhaps lightly, remained unanswered. Was she indeed happy or no? She hardly knew; she had never troubled herself with such an inquiry. Life meant to her daily toil, bread, shelter, matter-of-fact intercourse—no more. But the doubt once awakened could not be set at rest. She turned from him tremblingly; he repeated the words in the softest, tenderest tones, finding her still mute. The speaker drew her towards him, as he might have done a weeping child, and their lips met.

For one brief moment she felt herself understood. That kiss revealed depths of passion in her own nature, now for the first time called forth; that intercourse, all too swiftly ended, betrayed yearnings and inspirations that could never be satisfied. The delicious dream had come and gone. Bitterest tears had atoned for the stolen joy. And now the blessing—the curse was within reach again.

These bewildering thoughts passed with lightning-like fleetness through her brain. Her husband's voice dispersed them and the vision of that past day.

"Isabelle, Isabelle," André cried from below. "Quick, I want your help."

The sound of her husband's voice, so kindly, yet associated in her mind with the most ordinary existence only, recalled her to herself. The world of beauty and romance was unattainable as cloudland, that of common duty and sympathy in material things claimed her.

In a passion of disenchantment and remorse she tore off her dainty, pictorial gown and donned the threadbare bombazine. When André, obtaining no answer, ran upstairs, he found her flushed and agitated, but docile.

"The breakfast is to be packed and sent to the rocks, the officer is busy with his sketching," André said, too hurried to notice her excited looks; "and mind, Isabelle, he will sleep here to-night. You and I must give him our room. He dines, too; see that everything is ready."

There was no time for explanation. With trembling fingers

Isabelle packed the breakfast, taking care that everything should look and taste its best: the roast chicken garnished with cresses, the wine cooled in the fountain, the dessert of home-made brioche and macaroons carefully wrapped in writing-paper.

When André had set off with his burden, she began the remaining preparations, hardly giving herself time for breakfast. Thankful that there was so much to do, she did much more than was absolutely necessary.

"All that trouble for an officer!" said the grandmother contemptuously. "Much you will get rewarded for your pains. It is throwing money into the sea to spend so much good soap about this. Were the walls tapestried with cobwebs he would be none the wiser."

"Tush, tush," put in the grand-aunt, with her usual touch of spite. "Have you lived just upon ninety years without knowing that a képi and sword turn every girl's head? If it were a civilian going to lodge here to-night, Isabelle would not move a finger."

Isabelle made no reply to these taunts, she did not even toss her head scornfully, as was her wont. Without a word she carried broom, pail and scrubbing brushes upstairs, and the pair saw no more of her for hours.

IV.

Twilight gradually stole over the waste, lending its accustomed mysteriousness and witchery. Nothing could be more romantically, ethereally beautiful than the quiet tones and subdued harmonies of the scene now. A soft yet lustrous silveriness wrapped the lower stage, farm buildings, rock-strewed wilderness and Eldritch city, whilst far above and around, the deep violet outline of Causses and mountain rested against a greyish-blue heaven.

But if such the glamour cast by closing day about the landscape generally, what was the aspect of the city itself? that majestic capital, so real, so phantom-like, raised, one felt ready to swear it, by human agency, nevertheless untenanted as Persepolis or Palmyra.

The effect of twilight was here magical, the masses of grey stone gleaming like alabaster in the opaline light, the symmetrical outlines taking wonderful grace and lightness. No place for evil spirits, dread afrits, shapeless gnomes, seemed this; rather the haunt of gracious and beneficent geniuses, ministrants of peace and beauty to man.

Into this weird yet lovely scene stole Isabelle, and no figure could be more in keeping with it. She had exchanged her bombazine for a neat cotton gown, very light in colour, which looked like ghostly drapery as she hastened across the waste. André was feeding his stock. Jean and Charles were not yet home from the fair, the grand-dames watched the numerous earthen pots bubbling amid the ashes; it was surely her place to summon their guest to dinner.

She knew exactly where to find him. He was anxious to avail himself of every ray of light, finishing a sketch, André said, just outside the city. Strange that he should have chosen the self-same spot in which they had sat last year. Surely he expected her! There could be no harm in a hand-clasp, a whispered conference ere they parted for the second time, most likely for ever. She would pour out her loneliness, her yearning and her repentance. He would listen and console, perhaps press her lips to his own as before. Life would be easier after such an interview. Having sipped of the very essence of happiness, she felt as if she should thirst no more.

With flushed cheek, quickly-drawn breath and beating heart, she hastened towards the solitary figure amid the rocks. As she drew nearer and nearer, all doubts and misgivings were set at rest. Yes, she could not be mistaken. The dress, the slight, athletic form, the turn of the head, the very pose were his; just so had he rested his arms on his sketch-book, with upraised face drinking in the deliciousness of the hour.

To the astonished sketcher such an apparition seemed in keeping with the rest. A wraith could hardly have come as a surprise in such a place. When he caught sight of this slender, beautiful girl stealing towards him, as if sure of a welcome, he felt in the humour for mystery, ready to accept unrealities and believe in phenomena the most startling. There was little of the phantom about Isabelle, except her white dress and stealthy, gliding movements; still less did she recall the peasant maiden, daughter or wife of herdsman. It seemed impossible to imagine this glorious creature living amid such surroundings, no hardier, homelier life to be found throughout France.

Meantime the twilight gloom gathered fast. When the pair approached each other there was hardly light enough to discern features, had they been bent on such scrutiny. Without a second thought, only delighting as any young, adventuresome, beauty-loving man might do in the romantic situation, he now sprang to his feet and caught her outstretched hand. But Isabelle, overcome with joy and timidity, averted her face and burst into tears.

"You are unhappy. Make a friend of me. Let me help and comfort you," he said, leading her to a mossy seat, supporting her as she sat, still weeping, with her face buried in her hands.

"You will go to-morrow. My duties are here. We shall never meet again," she murmured. "But a word of sympathy, of kindness from those who understand us, how good it is; and your voice is not like the voices I hear every day. Its tones, so soft, so tender, have haunted me since first we met ——"

"Have we then met before?" asked the young man kindly.

That question, neither coldly nor indifferently, but put in a tone of surprise, stopped Isabelle's tears. She grew calm in a moment, chilled by his apparent forgetfulness, deeply wounded by what seemed to her want of heart.

"You were right to forget our meeting. I will forget too," was the proud reply. Then, once more overcome by the passionate longing of the moment before, and anxious to know something more of an existence which, in one sense, was linked with her own, she went on.

"Tell me of yourself. There can be no harm in that. Are you happy—are you beloved? I am only a poor peasant's wife: my business is to cook, darn and spin. But you are gifted, beautiful, favoured by fortune. Your lot should be brilliant. Many and many a time I have wished myself dead. Were I dying to-morrow, the thought that Raoul were well and joyous would bring me peace."

The Captain started. That mention of his dead friend straightway unravelled the whole mystery. Here, then, was a clue to Raoul Rivière's silence about the Eldritch city, the holding back of those wonderful sketches. A French officer of the better class, handsome, fascinating, warm-hearted, how can he choose but make love, be made love to, wherever he goes; leave behind him fond memories in many a girl's heart?

Everything became plain to him now. Raoul had, of course, visited the place; undoubtedly the first soldier artist who had found his way to such a world's end. Between him and the pathetic-voiced, superb-eyed maiden at his side had taken place an interchange of confidences, may-be of lovers' vows; he, alas! to cross the sea and be stricken down, she to remain behind, yearning for him, expecting him, after the woman's way. That she should imagine himself to be Raoul was natural enough, seeing that strangers rarely, if ever, penetrated these mountain fastnesses.

"You are in error, my poor girl," he began, much moved. "That name on your lips just now belongs not to me but another ——"

Isabelle drew back speechless with astonishment and mortification; then, a little recovering herself, she murmured:

"Forget what I have said; or, if you meet him again, bear a message for me. Say ——"

"No messages can reach him more," the Captain said very sorrowfully. "The Raoul you remember, so brilliant, so beloved, is dead. His grave is made in far-off Algérie, on the borders of the great desert."

"Dead!" cried Isabelle, sinking to the stony seat just quitted. "Raoul is dead?"

How the word changed everything to her, alike the world without and within—life in its outer aspects and the life of feeling and thought! A moment before, she had been possessed by a woman's clinging passion, her little sphere made up of beauteous dreams, spoiling her for the existence of every-day. Now, the prosaic past seemed to shrink into nothingness, she felt dwarfed, bruised and abashed as she contemplated it. Who was she to aspire to flawless happiness and what she regarded as the fulfilment of her destiny, when Raoul's

portion was to be cut off in the flower of his youth, his bright promise unrealised, his splendid powers undeveloped? He was dead, the darkness of the tomb wrapped him round, but she lived on, henceforth a perpetual rebuke to herself. In her desolation, she felt, to use the poet's words, that the grave holds all things beautiful and good. The beautiful twilight, earth with its fragrance and starry dome, seemed to have no meaning. Raoul was dead, the gay, the gifted, the generous. Not for him these flowery wastes, the glorious sky, the strange city of rocks; not for him love and sympathy.

"I have wept too. I loved him as a brother," the Captain said with blunt kindness. "But tears cannot bring him back again. Had we not better make our way to the farm?"

EPILOGUE.

But Raoul's voice reached Isabelle from the very tomb. The little episode, so bitterly repented of, confided to the faithful André with tears of shame, was destined to change the course of their existence. As if even unwise impulses of a generous, upright nature may work blessing, the confession of the stolen interview and its consequences brought about a perfect understanding between husband and wife, whilst the discovery of the young military engineer resulted in a wondrous change of fortune to both.

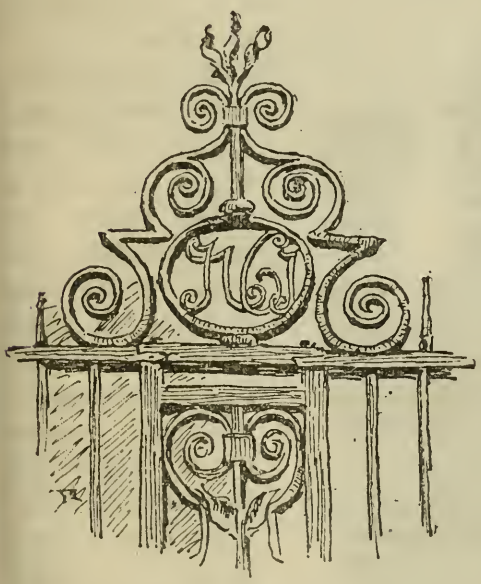
For discovery it must be called; the Eldritch city, apparently fashioned with skill and cunning, but the handiwork of nature only, had hitherto escaped the observation of topographers and geologists. Raoul's pencil had been the first to delineate it; the Captain having, to his great joy, identified the place, noised its fame abroad. Deputations of learned societies published reports, guide-books furnished descriptions, photographers and artists found their way to the marvellous site, the curious followed. Soon the rambling, ill-kept old farm-house was replaced by a cheerful, commodious inn. Isabelle, now neat and zealous, bustled about, no longer finding time for wayward repinings. André and his brothers, leaving farm work to others, acted as guides. Money flowed in rapidly. From May to October the place was alive with strangers, whilst the winter was spent in preparing for their arrival.

Not only André and his family were benefited by the change, the outlying districts being enriched by the yearly influx of strangers. The hitherto accursed city became a Providence to all.

And meantime, the poet's fate:—Raoul Rivière, who, in a certain sense, was the creator of the place, slept in his neglected grave on the borders of the desert. The marvel and beauty he had made visible to other eyes, as with a wand, were shut from his own for ever.

THE GHOST OF CLARE MANOR.

By Charles W. Wood, F.R.G.S., Author of "Through Holland," "Letters from Majorca," etc. etc.



Trinity Church.

A FEW months ago * we discoursed of Old Charterhouse and Old Charterhouse School, but we had no space to complete our subject by referring to New Charterhouse School. New Charterhouse at Godalming in contradistinction to Old Charterhouse at Smithfield. We were unable to say anything about this modern uprooting of an ancient and time-honoured institution. The matter had to be left, but it was quite possible to return to it on some future occasion.

Moreover, we had a singular ghost story to relate, and a ghost story in June seemed as untimely as snow in harvest. It was out of place; would lose all its creepy-crawly feeling; all its power for setting "each particular hair on end," like the ghost in Hamlet. Our own experience was quite as mysterious as regarded the ghost itself, but the surroundings were far less terrible. Of the key to the mystery we know nothing; it has yet to come, if it ever does come. But no ghost story, no supernatural appearance, was ever yet solved, as far as we know, and this that we have to relate will probably share the fate of all that have gone before. If the veil dividing the seen from the unseen has ever for a moment been lifted, the impenetrable silence has never been broken.

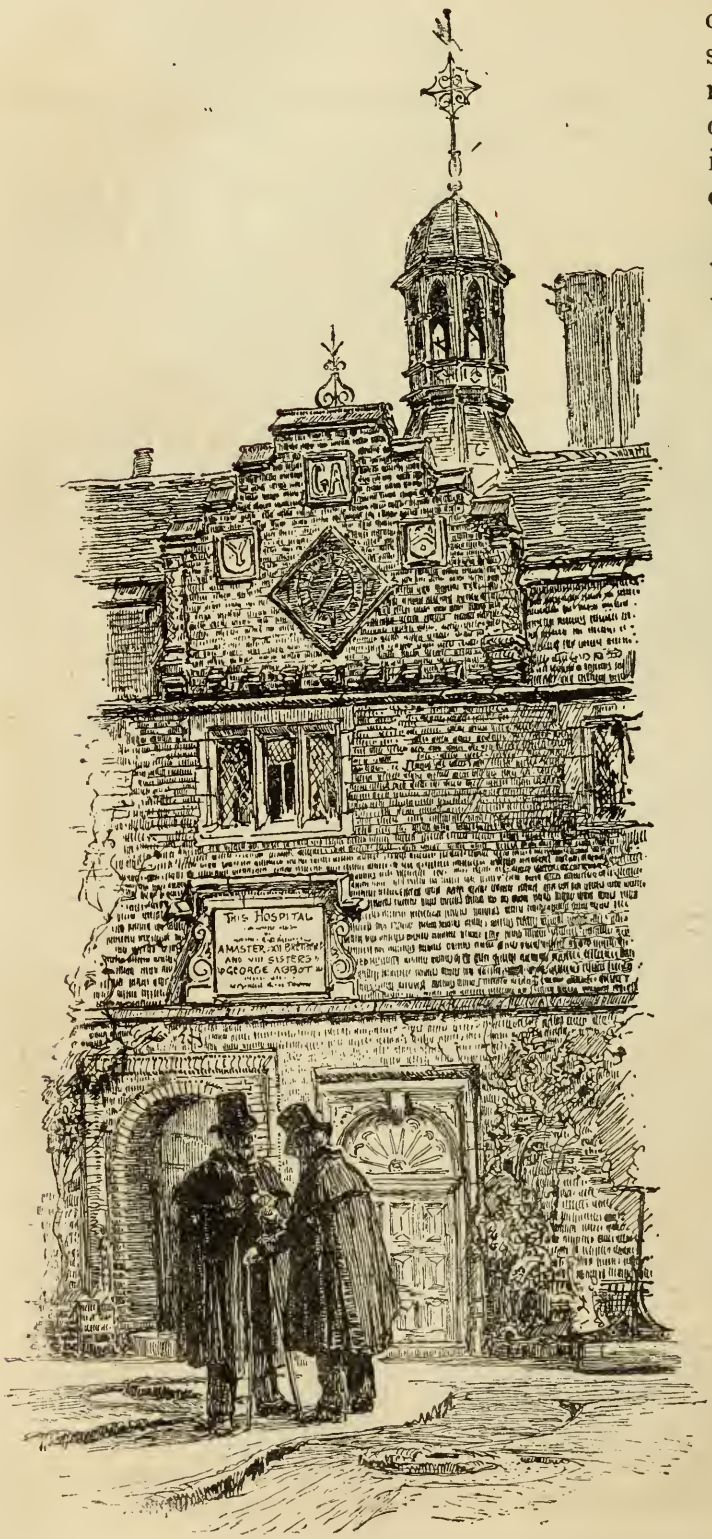
All we can say is that our ghost appeared to us—to three of us—on a sunny June afternoon, amidst the loveliest scenery, the most unghostly surroundings: velvety lawns, well-kept flower-beds, a calm flowing river; and that then, as now, the affair baffled all our attempts to explain it away.

But I will not anticipate.

The whole neighbourhood is beautiful and romantic. What, for instance, can be more interesting in its way than the town of Guildford, with its historical associations and its existing traces of Mediæval architecture? We lately paid it a visit, in company with our old

* Summer No. of *The Argosy*, 1890.

friend H. C.—one of many visits—and were more than ever struck by its quaint picturesqueness, its old Queen Anne houses—some of which are yet comparatively unspoiled — the remains of its ancient castle and its interesting churches.



ABBOT'S HOSPITAL.

Leaving the railway station, and turning into the High Street, a scene opens out that can have few equals of its kind in England. High Street, Guildford, the main street of the town, consists of a steep hill bordered on either side by houses, many of which are old-fashioned and gabled. Their quaint, diversified outlines stand out clearly against a background of blue sky, and much that is modern and aggressive is happily lost in this prospective view.

Half way up the hill stands the Town Hall, its open turret — a veritable temple of the winds—holding its solitary bell, crowned by an arrow that tells you too surely when the weather

HIGH STREET, GUILDFORD.

is easterly. On such occasions have nothing to do with Guildford; that rough, unwelcome friend to mankind rushes up and down the hill whistling and shrieking as if all the ghosts of the past had been let loose and were holding a demoniacal revel in the place where they had once lived and ruled, plotted and planned, done good and evil, until they too passed away into the unseen.

The upper part of the Town Hall with its quaint roof stands out in advance of its neighbouring houses; by which means a modern and very ugly red-brick bank-building is much concealed until you actually stand in front of it. Once there, you almost wonder the Town Hall, with its venerable dignity and its old-world atmosphere, does not fall with sorrow to the ground, and in its turn become also a ghost of the past.

Standing out from the Town Hall, half across the street, is the old clock, dated 1688, supported by a good deal of old gilt wrought-iron work. Beneath it are the large mullioned windows of the Council Chamber, panelled, but bare of furniture with the exception of a long, business-like table and some hard-backed chairs. The chimney-piece is curious, and worthy of notice; and the Mayor's Staff, given by Queen Elizabeth, is kept here. It is of ebony, the silver top bearing the town arms and the inscription "Fayre God, Doe Justice, Love thy Brether." Beneath this room is a large hall containing portraits of Charles II. and James II. by Lely, and a picture of Vice-Admiral Onslow receiving the Dutch Flag after the Battle of Camperdown.

An old iron-work balcony is in front of the windows of the Council Chamber, much in harmony with the rest of the structure, and supported by some ancient woodwork.

A short, dark, narrow staircase leads up to the Council Chamber. We wished to see the interior of a room that was outwardly so interesting. There was no one to grant or to withhold permission, and we ventured up the dark staircase.

The door of the chamber was ajar. Profound silence reigned. We thought it empty and looked in. The room was bare, as we have said, but with a distinctly ancient flavour about it. It was not empty. At the table sat three very wise-looking people, deeply absorbed in papers over which they were poring; so absorbed that they never looked up at our entrance. These gentlemen were the only modern and incongruous element about the place. They ought to have been at least a century old; dressed in ruffs and frills, pigtails and knee breeches. Instead of this they wore everything that is new and fashionable, including shaven heads and stiff upright collars.

At length in the silence of the room we heard one murmur to the other two:

"It cannot be met otherwise. We must raise the rates a farthing in the pound. There will be a revolt in the town; the streets will run with blood."

At least this was what we thought we heard. But there was a great echo in the room that was very confusing, and it may be that we were mistaken and something quite different was said. When we come to think of it, it seems hardly likely that the inhabitants of the quiet and peaceable town of Guildford should rise up in revolt and its streets run down with blood ; and all for the sake of a farthing in the pound.

H. C., indeed, declared that we had heard, as the French say, altogether à tort et à travers : and that all *he* heard, very distinctly, was the following fragment :

" Pray, how is Mrs. Jones this morning, Mr. Jones ? "

To which Mr. Jones replied :

" I thank you, Mr. Brown, Mrs. Jones is as well as can be expected." Which only proves that history, like the revolution of the earth, repeats itself.

We quietly withdrew ; but H. C., in a poetical absence of mind, stumbled down the dark staircase, and then apologised to empty space ; upon which there was a great scraping of chairs in the Council Chamber, and evidently some sort of consternation : Mr. Jones probably thinking that he had been hastily summoned home.

We gained the street and proceeded upwards as far as Abbot's Hospital. A more quaint, charming, old-world picture it would be difficult to find.

It is in the Tudor style, built of red brick, and founded in 1619, by Archbishop Abbot. His story is a romantic one. His parents were humble cloth workers, living in Guildford, and had narrowly escaped the stake in the reign of Queen Mary. Before he was born his mother had a dream in which a voice declared to her that if she would eat a pike, her son would rise to great eminence in the world. The next day in drawing water from the river, beside which their house stood, a pike came up in the bucket, which, as may be supposed, was joyfully dressed and eaten.

In due time the little child was born into the world, and rose in after years to be Archbishop of Canterbury. One of his brothers rose to be Sir Maurice Abbot, Lord Mayor of London, and a third became Bishop of Salisbury. The good Archbishop was much given to hunting, and one day—it was the 24th of July, 1621—in drawing his bow, killed a keeper whilst hunting deer in Bramshill Park. This was so great a grief to him, that he retired for a time to his own hospital ; and though he received a formal pardon from King James, he ever afterwards fasted on a Tuesday. In August, 1633, his own end came.

The hospital is an almshouse for twelve poor men and ten poor sisters. They must all be single, and turned sixty. Each has one room to himself, and here they live out their days in great peace and quietness.

Passing through the gateway into the quadrangle, a very effective

QUARRY STREET, GUILDFORD.

GRAMMAR SCHOOL, GUILDFORD.

scene is disclosed. In the centre of the Court are beds of old-fashioned, sweet-scented flowers, kept in perfect order. Not a leaf strews the ground, not a weed dare show itself. Surrounding this garden are the four walls of the building, of a dark red, wonderful and beautiful in tone. The eye rests upon it with delight. The quaint windows and window frames have stone dressings which stand out in contrast with the deep red of the walls. The ancient dining-room has some quaint carving and panelling: the original dining boards of solid oak; a wonderful old settle that one so rarely sees now; a huge fireplace, with dogs, where, in the winter, the "crackling faggot flies," and a cheerful blaze throws its ruddy glow upon the room, and sends out weird lights and shadows, whilst the brothers sit round and give out their experiences, and dwell lovingly upon the past, after the manner of the aged. There is some quaint carving in the large mantelpiece above. This is no longer used as a dining-room, excepting once a year, when the town gives a dinner to the brethren and the sisters.

A quaint old staircase, black with age and well carved, led to a room above, quite as interesting as that below. Here again was the huge fireplace, with its finely-carved mantelpiece, so much in keeping with the dark oak panelling of the walls.

Upon these walls hung several very fine pictures, one of which represents Lady Jane Grey, with a very winning and simple expression; the very last expression in the world to wish to claim a crown, with all its cares and responsibilities. What a sad, sweet halo of romance attaches to her memory; how one dwells upon every detail that has been handed down to us, from her earliest childhood to her last hours in the Tower of London; to that moment when she stood at the Tower window and saw her husband's dead body carried across Tower Hill as the price of his ambition; and she exclaimed, in accents that we can still hear, "Oh Guildford, Guildford!" They had been so recently married; life must have seemed so fair, might have been so happy. We see her in her last walk to the scaffold within the Tower precincts, in the last moments of her life: see her stretching out her hands and asking where the block is placed, bidding the executioner hasten his work. The very Tower itself would be less interesting than it is but for the memory of Lady Jane Grey.

From this upper room you look out upon the world through mullioned windows; and the world that you see is simply the charming quadrangle, with its wonderful tones and the gay flower-beds beneath. You also catch sight of the strong room, or upper room of the tower, where Monmouth was lodged on his return from his defeat at Sedgemoor.

In the south-east corner are the Master's apartments, where Abbot lodged whenever he visited his hospital, and where, for a time, he retired, after shooting Peter Hawkins, the keeper, with his barbed

arrow in Bramshill Park. This unfortunate accident created a great deal of schism in the Church; and the Arminian party declined to receive ordination or consecration from hands stained with blood. But King James was on the Archbishop's side, and declared that even an angel might have accidentally shot a man under the circumstances. The Archbishop lived down the scandal, but never reconciled it to his own conscience. This must be recorded in his favour.

Gazing from these upper windows, right before you is the principal entrance to the hospital, with its high entrance-tower and its domed turrets at the angles; the gates are large and handsome, of open iron-work, the three golden pears of the founder blazoned upon them, and the words: Deus nobis hæc otia fecit.

Altogether, next to Old Charterhouse in London, which was founded for pensioners in quite a different rank of life, we think that Abbot's little hospital at Guildford must be the most interesting in the kingdom. And not its least interesting portion is its beautiful little chapel, with its admirably-painted glass (for the period), where Sunday after Sunday this little "band of pilgrims" meet for worship.

Guildford is of very ancient date. It is supposed to have been once occupied by the Romans, but is first mentioned in history by its present name in the will of King Alfred, who bequeathed it to his nephew Ethelwald. Favoured by nature as well as art, it lies in a gorge of the great chalk ridge which stretches from Reigate to Farnham, and forms the southern limit of the Thames Valley.

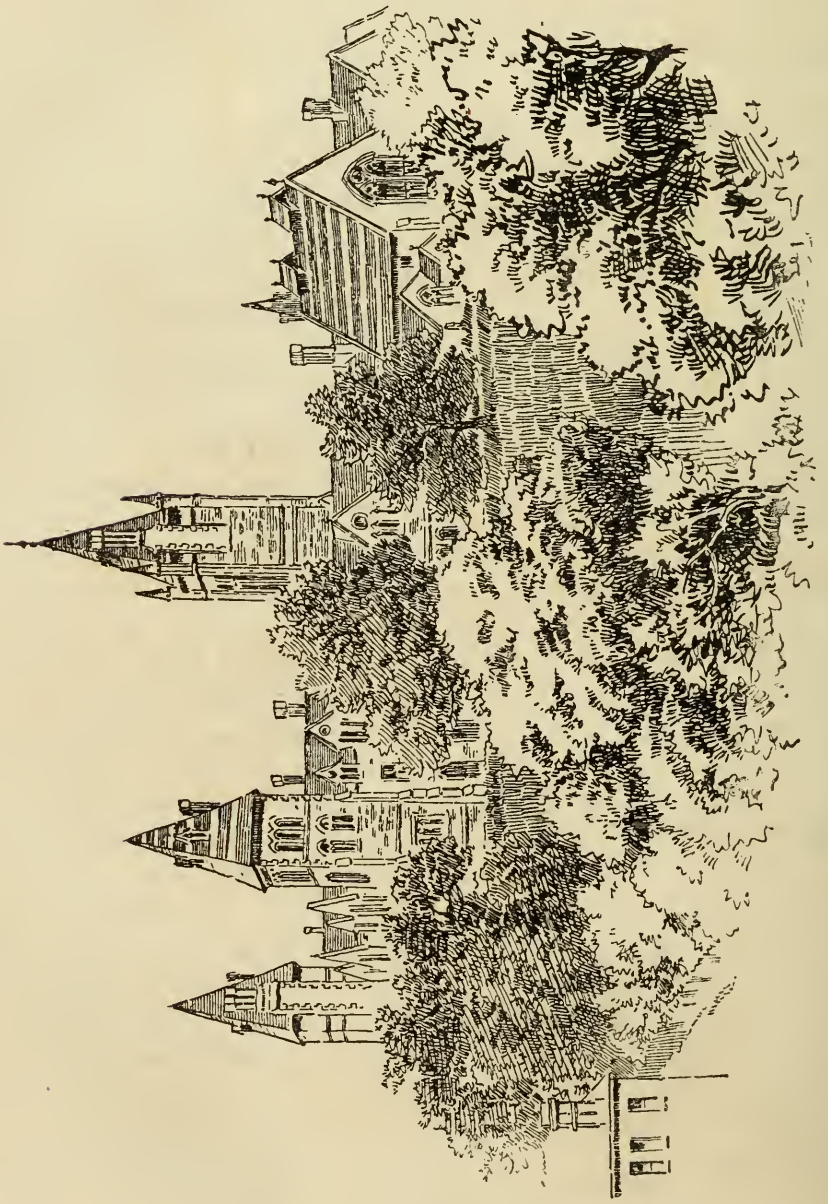
From any eminence you may see a succession of hill-chains, conspicuous amongst which is the celebrated Hog's back extending to Farnham. From this Hog's back you have a glorious view of a wonderful stretch of country on either side, and nothing will delight the eye more than the ridge of hills on the left, covered with a glorious mass of purple heather; where the "bee sucks" in the summer time, storing up honey as celebrated for its flavour as that which other bees gather in the neighbourhood of Salisbury Plain.

The most prominent object in Guildford, and the most ancient, is, of course, its Castle, of which nothing now remains but the keep. This, however, is still interesting as a relic of the past, and is sufficiently perfect to show a little of what has been. Originally it must have been of great extent. The keep itself is Norman, dating about 1150, and is very massive, the walls being ten feet thick. Much of the masonry is the curious herring-bone seen in Roman architecture, and which, in conjunction with the wonderful Roman cement, of which the secret seems to have been lost in the ages, would apparently defy Time itself.

The keep is now a ruin, crumbling and ivy-grown, and with all a ruin's picturesqueness. The staircase leading upwards is built within the walls, and in one part, in the wall itself, are the remains of what was formerly a small private chapel. Traces of rude carving may

still be seen: the Crucifixion and other religious emblems. It is surmounted by a barrel vault, and on one side an arcade of circular arches rest on columns with Norman capitals.

Guildford Castle is an ancient stronghold. Its earliest date is un-



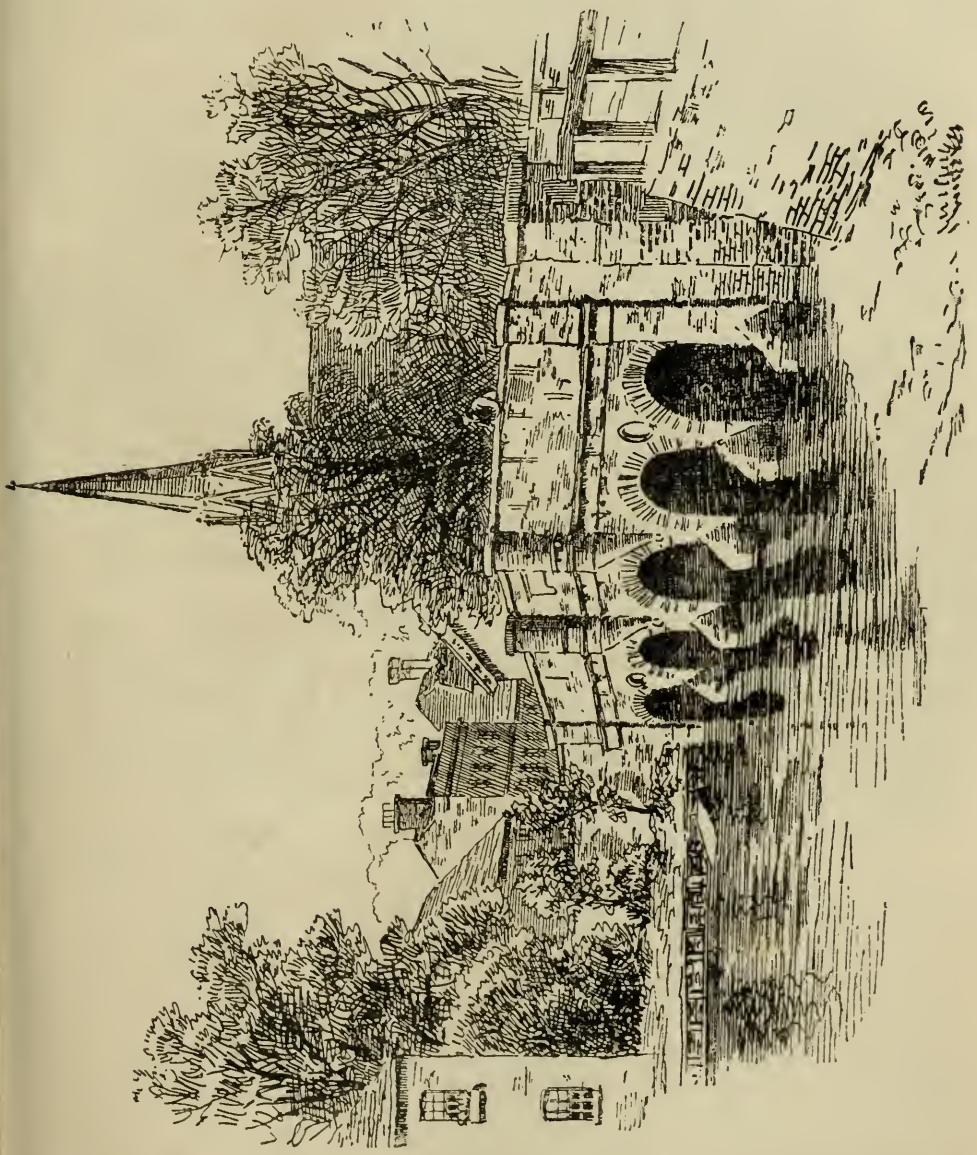
CHARTERHOUSE SCHOOL, GODALMING.

certain, like that of the town itself, but it is first mentioned in history in the eleventh century, and was a residence of the Saxon Princes.

Again it comes prominently forward in the thirteenth century, when Louis of France was appealed to by the barons and offered the Crown of England.

King John, having signed Magna Charta, straightway repented, as we know, fled to the Isle of Wight, procured a Bull from the Pope

annulling the Charta, and endeavoured to enlist an army of foreigners into his service. Louis, the son of King Philip of France, landed at Sandwich, and passed through Guildford on his way to Winchester in pursuit of John. He landed on the first of May, proceeded to London to receive the homage of the barons, and on the ninth of June took possession of Guildford Castle.



GODALMING.

After that it occasionally figures prominently in history down to the reign of James I., who granted it to Francis Carter.

Finally in 1885 it was sold by Lord Grantley to the Corporation of Guildford, who have turned the limited precincts of the Castle into pleasure grounds, with winding walks, and ponds holding gold-fish, and all the accompaniments one associates with tea-gardens and people's parks. It is an incongruous element to have introduced

into a Chapter of History, at war with the dignity and repose that should surround this grand monument of a past age. But so is the march of events in this "age of progress," and we everywhere see recreation grounds surrounding historical fragments, breaking up all the charms and associations of antiquity; and next to a town hall full of Mediæval beauty, the fine outlines and quaint gables of a past age, behold, there arises prominently and aggressively, a red-brick monument, which may well be dedicated to the folly and bad taste of the present day—as compared with its surroundings.

Nevertheless, the High Street is still full of quaint and charming bits of architecture. In some cases the upper part of the house has been spared, the lower has been modernised into shop-fronts with plate-glass windows; the two portions of the house being thus at eternal enmity with each other.

Next to the Town Hall, the Grammar School is well worthy a visit. It dates from the reign of Henry VIII., and over the entrance you will find the date, 1550. Parkhurst, Bishop of Norwich, was educated here; and, dying in 1574, bequeathed his library to the school, which still possesses it. Here, too, were educated the two Cottons, Bishops of Exeter and Salisbury, consecrated together in 1598: a circumstance which drew from Queen Elizabeth the remark that "she hoped she had now well *cottoned* the west." It is very picturesque, this Grammar School, with its mullioned casements, its gables, its dormer windows and its slanting roofs.

Guildford is also well off in the way of churches. They are almost in a line with each other, at equal distances, and are distinguished as High Church, Low Church, and Middle Church: Low Church, we fancy, being highest in point of ritual. But this is as it should be in a world where most things go by the Rules of Contrary.

High Church, or Holy Trinity, is opposite Abbot's Hospital. It is a red brick building, partly ivy-grown, and contains some fine tombs and monuments. Very little of the old church remains, and the present one dates from 1763. One of its chief monuments is that erected by Sir Maurice Abbot to the memory of the Archbishop.

But the most interesting church is that of St. Mary, the "Middle Church," which stands in Quarry Street, overlooking the picturesque banks of the river on the one side, and almost overshadowed by the ruins of the keep on the other. This church, too, has suffered by restoration, but much that is excellent still remains. It lies amidst ancient houses that remind one of some of the quaint, old-world bits one sees in some of the French and German Mediæval towns, but so seldom in England.

The church is built of chalk mixed with flint. The interior consists of a nave and two chancels, the latter terminating in chapels with circular apses. Many traces remain of the days when the Roman Catholic religion held sway in England. The east end of the chapel,

once semicircular, is now square; and the interior has altogether been much altered and spoiled for the convenience of modern times. Yet it is still very beautiful and quaint, very different from most churches that one sees nowadays.

The oldest part of the church is Norman, and is said to have been built in the reign of Stephen. It once had a richly-groined roof, part of which still remains. The low, square embattled tower rests on four arches. The original windows and the side chapels are Early English, proving that the church was enlarged in the thirteenth century. It is a mixture of dates and a transitional period. The north and south arches supporting the tower are Circular or Norman, and are the earliest part of the present church; the east and west arches are Perpendicular. The pillars of the nave are Circular and Norman, yet they support Pointed arches.

The corbels which supported the original roof are adorned with monsters whose quaint and grotesque hideousness we have seldom seen equalled. Looking upwards from the west end of the church, the effect is very singular: three steps leading from the nave to the tower, three more to the chancel, which looks framed, almost closed in, by the massive intervening arches.

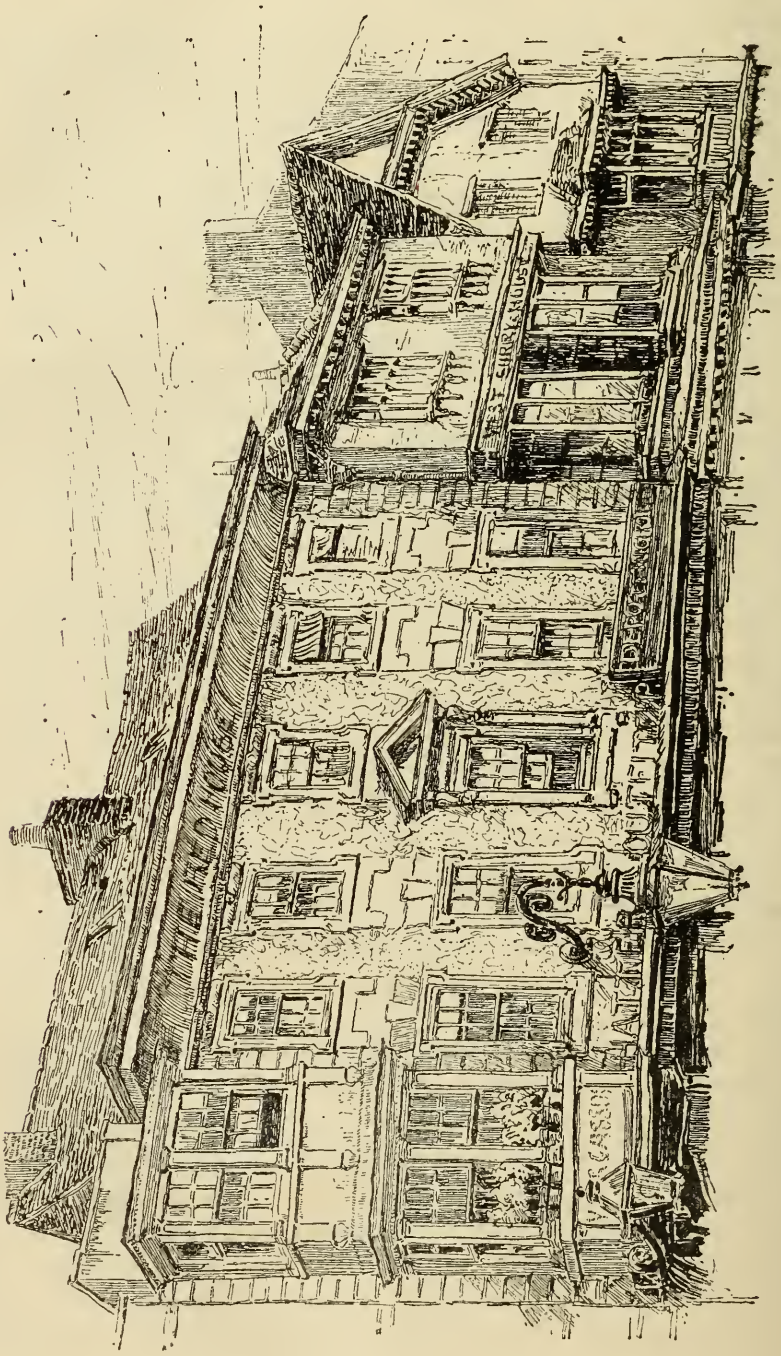
The side chapels are dedicated to St. John the Baptist and to St. Mary. The latter has been turned into a vestry or robing-room, and the organ stands here; the former is adorned with some exceedingly interesting frescoes representing various baptisms, in which some of the figures are grotesquely represented with their noses turned the wrong way. Another represents St. Michael weighing a soul in the balance; the evil spirit places his foot in the scale, but does not succeed in weighing it down. In yet another an angel is consigning two lost souls to a horned demon, who triumphantly carries them off to torment. All these frescoes and medallions are supposed to be the work of one William the Florentine, who came over in the reign of Henry III. to undertake the paintings in the king's palace at Guildford.

The ancient houses referred to make Quarry Street wonderfully picturesque and artistic. It ought to be indeed the fulfilment of many an artist's dream. Between the houses, through narrow openings, you catch lovely glimpses of the river, on which perhaps the sun is sparkling and flashing; of green banks and waving trees and lovers' walks.

Thus we see how much that is interesting and picturesque and old-world still exists in Guildford, as compared with most of our English towns—and we have only touched upon the various features; leaving much unrecorded, which the reader, visiting the town, may easily discover for himself.

The surrounding neighbourhood, too, possesses many places that are historically interesting. In one of these, Moor Park, lying under the shadow of Crooksbury Hill, we have spent many happy hours as the guest of the late Mr. La Trobe Bateman.

Moor Park was originally in the possession of Sir William Temple, and is for ever connected with recollections of Swift and Stella. It became the retreat of Sir William Temple in 1686, after the death of



High Street, Godalming.

his son, when he withdrew from public life. It was here that William III. taught Swift to cut asparagus in the Dutch way; "and the king," says Swift, "always ate the stalks as well as the heads." But this surely must have depended on the asparagus, for scarcely

an ostrich would venture upon the stalks of much that is now sent to market.

Swift, as Sir William Temple's secretary, served him for twenty pounds a year and the privilege of boarding at the second table. We all know the picture of the uncouth, eccentric young Irishman, possessing a genius no one then dreamed of, but which was one day to become world-wide: and that of Stella, who was Lady Gifford's waiting-maid, bright, sparkling and lovely, the favourite of her mistress and the ornament of the servants' hall. We all know the history of the loves of Swift and Stella, which have taken rank with the celebrated loves of the rest of the world: those of Laura and Beatrice and Héloise: and in which of course there was a most unhappy element.

Stella's abode, embowered in green, is still one of the prettiest spots of Moor Park. If love could ever be happy in a cottage, surely it is here. From its windows you may see the grounds of the neighbouring estate of Waverley, with the ruins of the old Cistercian Monastery: which suggested to Sir Walter Scott the name by which he distinguished his series of novels.

So, roving, we come to Godalming, which consists chiefly of one long street on the south of the Wey.

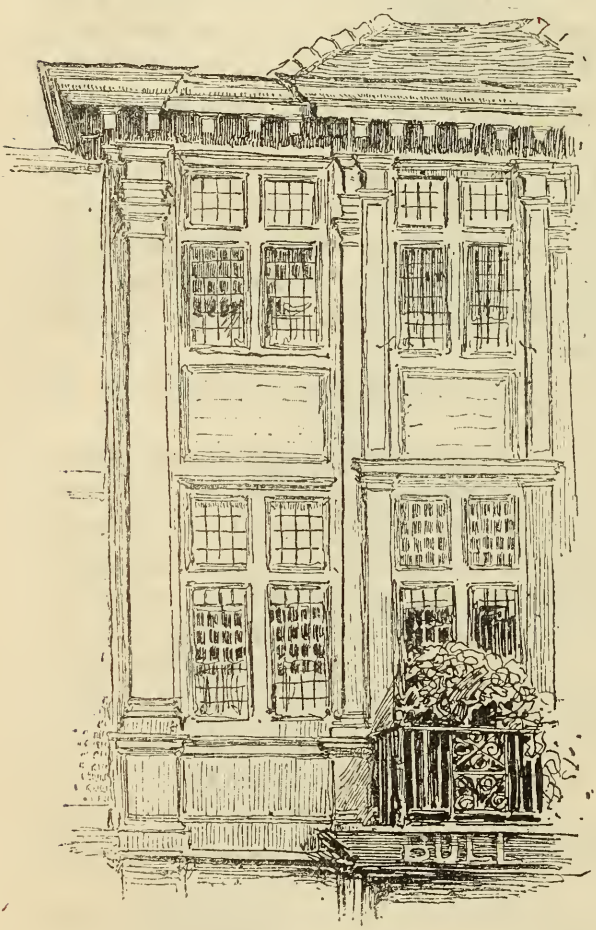
Godalming, too, is ancient, and possesses many quaint and curious bits of architecture. Like Guildford, it goes back to the days of Alfred the Great, by whom it was bequeathed to his nephew Ethelhelm. Close to the church is the manor of Westbrook, which once belonged to General Oglethorpe, the friend and patron of Dr. Johnson, one of our earliest opposers of slavery, one of the first reformers of our prisons. He was born at Godalming in 1698 and died in 1785. It is said that Johnson wished to write his biography. He led an active and varied life; in early days served under Prince Eugene, and was present at the siege of Belgrade as his secretary and aide-de-camp, and went out to America with seven hundred prisoners, and founded a colony in Georgia. His biography, therefore, would have been an eventful one.

Above the town, on the crest of Frith Hill, now rise the spires and building of New Charterhouse; new in point of situation, old, as we know, from the point of antiquity.

Some courage must have been needed to remove the school from the time-honoured precincts of Old Charterhouse in London. It must have been an uprooting of traditions, of associations, of memories sacred to the past. Every room was haunted with ghosts; those ghosts amongst which we love to linger; every stone had been trodden by feet that had gone forth to fame and glory; the quadrangle had echoed with voices before which the world had afterwards bowed down.

All this had to be forsaken: the old given up for the new. The old *esprit de corps* was buried of necessity; a new one must spring

up amidst the Surrey hills, and this would take time. Everything takes time; Rome was not built in a day. Nevermore would the boys' faces appear at the chapel of Old Charterhouse in their appointed places, so great a contrast with the faces of the aged Brethren in the centre pews, so marked an illustration of youth and age: the one passing into the sere and yellow leaf, life practically over; the others with all of life before them, possessors of the world; time and strength, ambition and opportunity, all theirs.



WINDOW IN HIGH STREET, GUILDFORD.

It was a sad upheaval, a terrible exodus. And yet it was wisely done: how wisely the result has proved: how wisely anyone can decide for himself who will go and explore the lovely and classical haunt of Old Charterhouse, breathe its close, confined air, lose his way in the fogs of winter, note the surrounding purlieus which are "cabined, cribbed, confined," unsavoury and over-populated; and then go straight down to Godalming, and, from the brow of Frith Hill, look around upon all the glorious prospect of the Surrey hills and vales, note the richness of the waving, whispering trees, the sparkling waters of the Wey, breathe the pure air of heaven, exult in the blueness of the sky, the brilliance of the sunshine, the lovely lights and shadows of the landscape. Old Charterhouse is a rare gem in a rude, rough setting; New Charterhouse has taken up its career in one of the loveliest spots of England. Here life becomes a poem.

A large pile of buildings, with a mixture of the Early English and Decorated styles, there is a great deal about it that is very picturesque, and the towers rise very nobly above the surrounding trees. It is a little world of its own, enclosed as it were within its own precincts, the houses of the masters rising up here and there; the whole separated by a mile of uphill from the town of Godalming.

It had been our pleasant fate to go down rather frequently of a Saturday afternoon, so that the Charterhouse became quite a well-known haunt, a familiar friend. On these occasions my companions for most of the time were two young Carthusians whom we will distinguish as H. Major and H. Minor.

They have appeared before in these pages in scenes across the water, where mischief was ever the order of the day, and sometimes ended in a threatened summons before the Juge de Paix. The reader may not have forgotten Mademoiselle Henriette at Guines, who gave them their hearts' desire in the way of jam and galettes, and declared them to be angels when they had upset a huge water-jug in her best bed-room, flooded her carpets, turned her bolsters and pillows out of the windows, and generally *bouleverséd* the whole establishment.

Mademoiselle Henriette was a signal example of an honest, large-hearted and generous woman, and the consequence is that she has retired upon a large fortune, drives her *équipage* and enjoys life; all obtained from a small country hotel. The Lion d'Or has changed hands, and we have never since had the courage to enter it. Not long ago we passed by; it looked the same as ever, with its open windows and its green shutters thrown back, its door thrown wide, and its small tables on the pavement. But we would not enter; with a sigh given to the light of other days we went our way. Looking backward, there are certain weeks or months in the years, and we would give the wealth of the Indies to live them again; they held a charm and a happiness that to dwell upon is almost pain. Yet who that has had them would be without such days and recollections?

We passed by the Lion d'Or and went our way; and that way led us into the Bois de Guines; that lovely and extensive forest, where you may lose yourself in quiet, sylvan paths, the trees overshadowing you, brushwood growing beneath your feet, where the squirrels peep at you from the branches with their bright eyes, give their tails a frisk and dart away out of sight. There is a wide carriage path right through the wood, and the wheels bowl over the soft mossy turf with scarcely sound enough to disturb the rabbits nibbling the grass at your very feet; no noise, excepting when the driver cracks his whip and wakes the echoes of the woods. Here and there you catch long, lovely vistas of forest, the trees looking like sentinels in eternal sleep. There are green glades that were made for picnics, only no one ever goes there. The French do not understand that thoroughly English delight. Their idea of happiness is to go to a café, and within four walls, amidst smoke and a stifling atmosphere, much noise and merriment, pass through the laughing hours. Very laughing and happy they make them.

Well for Mademoiselle Henriette that it is so, or her Sundays would have been less crowded and she might never have retired as a

Personage and a *rentière*. People do not always get their deserts in this life; or if they come, it is too often when the song has left the bird and the golden days of youth have flown for ever. The calm and philosophical age has been entered upon, and even "great possessions" will cause no flutter of emotion or disturb the balance of the mind.

But this is wandering from our subject.

One Saturday afternoon the two Hs had met me at Godalming station. It was a glorious day. The sun shone in an almost cloudless sky. There was just sufficient breeze to rustle the leaves and make music in the branches. It was the month of June—the perfection of time and weather. The air was full of the scent of roses.

We chartered one of the open flys at the station; quite a magnificent barouche, with a driver in livery of a green so bright that, somehow, he reminded one of Robin Hood. Not that our driver had anything of the robber about him; he was, as yet, hardly out of his teens, and he was very just in his demands, and modest in his after expectations.

We started for Guildford. It is a lovely drive, through undulating country richly wooded, with here and there a stretch of common to mark the contrast. Occasionally we passed a charming country seat belonging to those whose lines have fallen in pleasant places. Approaching Guildford, you come to the ruins of St. Catherine's Chapel, where it is well to get out, climb the hill and survey the magnificent prospect, framed into pictures by the outlines of the windows. In yonder mill-pool formerly stood the "ducking stool," the terror and punishment of shrewish women: an institution evidently done away with too soon. The river Wey here flows between green meadows, catching up and distributing around myriad flashes of sunlight. A little way off the roofs and towers of Guildford rise up, crowned by the ruins of the Castle.

On the summit of a distant hill is the ruined chapel of St. Martha, standing out solitarily against the background of the pure blue sky. The legend has it that two giant sisters named Martha and Catherine built these two chapels with their own giant hands, with nothing but one hammer, which they threw from hill to hill as each required it. It is a small but very picturesque ruin, that of St. Catherine's, representing the religious element, as the Castle represents the warlike. Not far from here you may trace the course of the Pilgrims' Way: the road followed by the pilgrims in the days before the Reformation, when pilgrimages to the Canterbury Shrine took place in England, just as they still do abroad to other shrines.

We passed the ruins and had soon entered Guildford, and, dismissing our Robin Hood, were left to our own devices. These invariably took a certain unspoken direction, towards the top of High Street, where a celebrated confectioner dealt in admirable ices. Ices

have been a weak point with schoolboys from time immemorial, and are likely to hold their own to yet unborn generations. To the lady who dispensed the ices we were familiar objects, and it was unnecessary to give any orders on entering. Sometimes, the ices being unusually superlative, the two Hs would return to the charge, with a slight blush by way of apology, and the president at the counter would give a smile, which said as plainly as if it had spoken, "Boys will be boys," leading to an undertone from the two Hs which it would be unwise to record.

After this, they, always taking the initiative, would descend the hill, turn in to the White Hart, and order a heavy tea to be ready punctually at six o'clock, with unlimited jam and fruit. We were always their most obedient servant, retiring modestly into the background. Their part was to order and command; ours merely to settle up the small accounts and return our grateful thanks for the privilege.

So, on this Saturday, all this being satisfactorily accomplished, we proceeded onwards and downwards to the bridge that so picturesquely spans the Wey, and hired a boat. My tyrants decided that it was exactly the day for a lazy row on the river, where we might enjoy the cool plashing of the oars, the reeds that grew by the river side—if haply there should be any—the lights and shadows of the landscape. "You can have the ropes and do nothing but steer and take life easily," said they, magnanimously. "We will work for our living, and of course you will give us good wages. Only be careful not to run us into a barge or a boat, or on to the bank."

For this had now and then happened on other occasions, when perhaps the mind had drifted into absentee-ism, or the attention had been caught by a lark soaring overhead, "ever singing as it soared," or by pictures in the clouds beyond.

I obeyed humbly, conscious of previous shortcomings; remindful of expressions upon their faces, on such occasions, of a pitying compassion infinitely more cutting to the feelings than the sharpest rebuke.

It was certainly a very glorious afternoon. The sun was shining in full power; there was scarcely a cloud in the sky. I wish to impress this upon you. No day could have been less ghostly. None could have supposed that ghosts would be abroad. If ever ghosts had haunted our imagination, they certainly did not to-day. Who thinks of ghosts in June? As I said just now, they seem as out of place as snow in harvest. Though if there are ghosts, no doubt they have all times for their visitations: like Death, they claim all seasons as their own.

We had drifted a long way down, lured into insensibility of time by the dolce-far-niente character of the afternoon. H. Major suddenly remembered that such a thing as a heavy tea had been ordered, and that it was too good a thing to be kept waiting; and he gave the word of command to turn. We had gone further than we had intended.

On our backward journey we caught sight of a board near the

river, intimating that the place was to be let. Rowing against stream was hard work this hot afternoon, and the two Hs, resting upon their oars, looked about them.

The banks of the river were low. A few rushes grew there, and we teered the boat into them with a delicious sound. Fair lawns spread out before us; trees stately and waving; flower-beds kept in the perfection of order. The perfume of roses was in the air, and roses grew in profusion. Every choice specimen seemed there; from the old-fashioned, sweet-scented cabbage-rose, to the delicate and refined Gloire de Dijon and Maréchal Niel. Far in the background stood a house of noble proportions; it was ancient and built in the Elizabethan style. Slight changes had been made in the lower architecture, for the windows opened on to a broad terrace which led by steps to the lawns.

The house was empty. This charming place was at anyone's disposal who chose to hire it.

"It is the very place for us," said H. Minor. "Do take it. Then we can come over every Wednesday and every Saturday; we should see so much more of each other, and you would never have the bother of coming all the way from town."

"And think of the lovely Heavy Teas you could give us," said H. Major in his largest capitals; "the Unlimited Strawberries and Cream we should come in for. Let us moor the boat and land and look over the house. I daresay there is a caretaker somewhere about."

The proposal was no sooner made than carried out. The boat was moored to the side: surely Pan was in those reeds playing upon his pipe, though we heard him not; the place, the hour, and the occasion were altogether so perfect: and we landed upon the greensward.

"I feel as if we were trespassing," said H. Major. "We have no order to view. These caretakers are always so mighty particular about their 'orders.'"

"Our appearance is quite sufficient," returned H. Minor magnificently; "and," turning to their humble servant, "no one would ever dare deny you anything."

We accepted the compliment with a wise shake of the head, which might be interpreted any way, like some famous Parliamentary speeches of modern times. We all stood a moment gazing at the house. It was certainly very charming and picturesque. Judged outwardly, nothing seemed wanting to make it the perfection of a residence. We really began to entertain H. Minor's proposal.

As we looked, suddenly a form appeared at one of the lower windows. It was the form of a man, dressed in a shabby suit of mourning. He looked old, and his white hair was worn long; but though old, he was hale and vigorous, and on his face was a fine fresh colour, rather unusual in one of his age. He gazed at us for

a moment: then, apparently satisfied with his scrutiny, threw open the casement, and made a sign which seemed to bid us advance. We noticed that the left hand was kept pressed over his heart, almost as if in pain.

We drew near to the house, and he made way for us to enter. We did so. The room was large and lofty; a room of fine dimensions. It might have been a drawing-room or a ball-room.

"It appears to be a charming house," I said, by way of breaking the silence. "We should much like to go over it, if it is not putting you to trouble."

For our entertainer seemed quite above the ordinary level of caretakers. He was dignified, and there was a repose of manner about him that suggested a man of education and refinement: a gentleman, in fact. Altogether it seemed rather mysterious. Who could he be?

As we entered he had withdrawn to a little distance—an action we had put down to deference, though it was unnecessary; and he never approached nearer to us than a distance of about four yards. No matter how we endeavoured to approach him, we never succeeded in doing so. We spoke to him, but he never replied; took no notice of our question, even when it was repeated in another form.

"Poor fellow! He is evidently deaf and dumb," said H. Major. "How strange to have a deaf and dumb caretaker. How does he manage to hear the bells when people come?"

"Probably has a wife in the lower regions," returned H. Minor. "A deaf and dumb man couldn't live alone in an empty house. Just fancy what a melancholy life he would have of it!"

But our guide seemed to know our desire by instinct, for he conducted us through room after room, upstairs and downstairs, every door being open. Our footsteps echoed through halls and corridors; his we noticed made no sound.

"Deaf people often talk in low tones," said H. Major, presently; "evidently they also tread lightly. He must have india-rubber soles to his boots. I wish they would put india-rubber round the clapper of the bell that wakes us in the morning."

"And so be late for chapel," returned H. Minor, "and have extra school if you got caught. I don't think there would be any pull in that."

We were in an upper room when this interesting fragment of conversation took place, looking out upon the drive. Suddenly, as we looked, we noticed a carriage sweep round, and come rapidly up to the door. It was an old-fashioned chariot, high, with a C-spring. The coachman wore a wig with a pigtail; a footman standing up behind also wore a pigtail. The horses pranced along, and it drew up at the front door; but without noise.

"How singular!" cried H. Minor. "These windows must be double, or hermetically sealed. I can't hear a sound. And what a

creepy feeling there is in the atmosphere! I declare I believe the place is haunted. And what an old-fashioned turn-out! It ought to be in Madame Tussaud's room of antiquities. It would just match some of the old frights there."

The footman with the pigtail got down quickly, put down the steps of the carriage, opened the door as if to admit someone; closed it again, mounted to his place behind, and the carriage drove off. We had seen no one get in or get out.

I began to think it very strange, and turned to try and get some sort of explanation of our guide. He had disappeared, and we were alone. Supposing that he had merely gone downstairs, we went down also, and made our way into the room we had first entered.

At this moment a door banged loudly in the house; too heavily for anything but the front door; and we heard very human footsteps advancing. Next moment a woman appeared and gazed at us in undisguised astonishment. She was a little woman with a red face, and round, black, beady eyes, and was dressed in a red and black plaid shawl. Like most little women, she was self-asserting.

"Gentlemen, how did you get in?" she cried. "Who opened that window? I left every window closed and bolted, when I went out on an errand an hour ago."

"I suppose it was your husband," we replied, though we certainly thought them a very ill-matched couple; the woman little better than an ordinary servant; the other apparently a man of refinement and a gentleman.

"Husband?" she asked. "I'll thank you, sir, not to take away my character. I've no husband, and have had nothing to do with the perfidious sect since I was basely jilted by a corporal in the 10th Lancers thirty-four years ago come Michaelmas. No man has been inside these doors, sir, since I became caretaker here six months ago. No, nor never shall. I was born Martha Muggins, and Martha Muggins I hope to die."

"We can assure you," we replied, "that the window was opened and we have been shown through the house by an old gentleman with white hair, and dressed in black. We think he must be deaf and dumb, for he never spoke, and never answered any of our remarks. He has disappeared, but must be about the house somewhere."

Whilst we spoke the woman backed against the wall in evident terror; her face blanched, her little black eyes grew round with horror.

"Mercy be good to us!" she cried. "It must be the ghost I've heard talk of. It's said the house is haunted, but I have never seen nothing, and I didn't believe it."

"Woman," we rebuked, a strange sensation nevertheless taking possession of us, "there are no such things as ghosts; what we have seen must be real flesh and blood. There is no doubt a man in the house, and you will probably find him in your kitchen setting out the tea-things and toasting your muffins."

"I declare to goodness ——" began the woman, then broke off abruptly. "Come this way, gentlemen, and see for yourselves."

Martha Muggins—to give her her name—led the way to the kitchen and we followed. It was on a level with the drawing-room. The kitchen was empty. A small fire burnt in the grate, the kettle sang on the hob, a cat was stretched out at full length on the hearth; but there was no trace of human being.

"There!" cried the woman triumphantly. "And you may search from roof to cellar, and never a man will you find on the premises. Martha Muggins I was born, Martha Muggins I'll ——"

"But whose was that carriage," we interrupted, more and more puzzled; "an old-fashioned chariot that drew up to the front door just before you came in, and drove off again without anyone getting in or out? We certainly thought it very curious."

"Carriage, sir? Carriage? Why it must be part of the ghost performance. No carriage could have got in. The gates are closed and locked, and there lies the key upon the dresser, where it has been for the last three days. Come and see."

Again we followed. We all filed out and down the walk, and proceeded to the gates, which could not be seen from the house for a large amount of shrubbery which stood in the way. The large iron gates were certainly closed and locked. A smaller gate at the side was open, but no carriage could have passed through it. We knew not what to say.

"What is the story you have heard?" we asked at length. "You tell us the place is said to be haunted?"

"The story runs this way, sir," replied the woman, shivering in the broad sunshine. "It's said that more than a hundred years ago a murder was committed here on the 18th of June ——"

"The 18th of June," we interrupted; "why, this is the 18th of June!"

"Mercy be good to us!" cried the woman once more. "I'd no idea of the date. That accounts for it. Every year since the murder, it's said that the murdered man appears: an old gentleman with longish white hair and ordinary black clothes; no knee breeches, no buckles, no nothing fine or antique. It's said that on the 18th of June, more than a hundred years ago, a lady drove up in her carriage, entered the house, stabbed him to the heart, and drove off again."

"And what became of her?" we asked, wondering whether we were awake or dreaming.

"When she reached her home, it's said she was found dead in her carriage—poisoned by her own hand."

"What is the name of the place?" we asked, thinking this the strangest afternoon we had ever spent.

"It's called Clare Manor, sir. Originally belonged to the St. Clares, who have all died out. But they dropped the St. before that

happened, and only called themselves Clare. And a good thing too, for there must have been more sinners than saints amongst them."

"How long has Clare Manor been to be let?"

"Nearly a year, sir, and it won't be let in a hurry if it's haunted. I've been here just six months. And now what am I to do? I have never believed in the ghost, but they say seeing's believing. I can't stay as caretaker in a haunted house."

"Perhaps," we suggested, "if it only appears once a year, it is all over for the present, and you may be free from further intrusion for at least twelve months."

The woman shivered. "I don't know," she murmured. "Men are perfidious creatures; that lancer corporal was the worst of his sect, and I've never believed in one of them since; but I'd rather have to do with a dozen men than one ghost. I must consult my niece when she comes in. The carriage, sir? That carriage came for the ghost. It's said to come every year, and the old gentleman goes off in it."

Time was passing; the afternoon shadows were beginning to lengthen; we had still a long row before reaching Guildford. We made our way round to our boat, the woman escorting us, possibly "for company." As we shot out into the stream a slight scream arrested us.

"The Order! the Order!" cried the woman excitedly. "You haven't given me the ORDER."

"You must ask the ghost for it," returned H. Minor, "the 18th of next June. And please give our compliments and thanks to the old gentleman for his polite attentions to us to-day."

And the last we saw of Martha Muggins as the boat shot round a bend of the river she was wringing her hands in despair, evidently quite as much "upset in her mind" at the loss of the order as at the appearance of the ghost.

Our row back was a very silent one. I knew not what to think. The whole experience had been strange, inexplicable, full of mystery. What did it all mean? In vain we revolved the question in our mind. If we had been alone we might have supposed that we had fallen asleep and dreamed it; but we were not alone, and it was no dream. We thought over the matter that night, we have thought of it often since, and we have come to no conclusion in the matter. Or rather, can we come to any other than one conclusion? This strange experience, must it not actually have been an appearance from the world of spirits, which, ever since the foundation of the world, in all ages, have been said occasionally to come back to the scenes of their earthly haunts. "All reason may be against it," said Dr. Johnson, "but the weight of evidence is all in its favour; and you cannot set aside such an array of witnesses."

We landed that afternoon rather more silently than was our usual order of proceeding.

"Hope you enjoyed the row, sir? Nothing happened?" said the boatman, noticing probably our subdued air.

"Charming day; the very day for a row," we replied, ambiguously, and went our way.

"On the whole, I don't think I would take that house," said H. Major, thoughtfully, as we went up the hill towards the White Hart.

"But what about the Wednesdays and Saturdays, and the Heavy Teas, and the Unlimited Strawberries and Cream?"

"Oh, well," contemplatively, "it would be hard lines—it would be too bad to be disappointed of *that;* you must come down as often as you possibly can, and we must make the best of the White Hart resources. But, after all, you know, *you're* what we care about; not the strawberries and cream. Not but what they are lovely accessories."

A very pretty speech, which, of course, made me more abjectly their slave than ever.

It was some consolation to find that their fine appetites were in no way affected by our late experience, wild and mysterious though it had been; they did full justice to the good things provided by the White Hart: and later on we parted as usual at the railway station, their train steaming on towards Godalming, ours towards London. And as we took our solitary journey, and pondered over the strange, incomprehensible events of the afternoon, we could only repeat the oft-quoted words of the Prince of Denmark: "There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy."

SONNET.

Sweet sleep! ah far more dear art thou to me
Than all my waking hours, for when thy hand
Leads me within the dim mysterious land,
Her spirit, like my own, released by thee,
Awaits me there, and once again I see,
In the dream light, the dear-loved smile of old;
And cherished memories of the past unfold
Their hidden leaves to sunshine, breeze and bee;
And once again her hand in mine I take,
And wander where the woodlands thrill with birds;
Or pause beside the sleeping, moonlit lake,
In silent ecstasy too deep for words.
Sweet sleep! what wonder if to thee I give
My praise, for when I wake I cease to live.

Sydney Hodges.

THREE FAMILY STORIES.

By the Rev. F. O. W.

THE following stories need but little introduction. I declare them to be absolutely authentic. The persons mentioned in them have been dead many years, and were members of my mother's family. As a boy I frequently heard my mother relate them, and when a young man at Cambridge, and on a visit to a fellow collegian at M. in D—shire in the Christmas of 1850, I met two old ladies, each over seventy, and cousins (once removed) of my mother—Miss Mary Elwood, and her sister, Mrs. Wolfe (born Kate Elwood). They kindly asked me to tea (and muffins—to which I am partial), and I went, and made myself, I believe, very agreeable. From them I heard again the stories I had heard before from my mother. They had been eye-witnesses of the incidents I have written down, and I write them just as I heard them. I neither add to the facts nor take from them. I do not pretend to explain or to understand them; I only know that they happened. Mrs. Wolfe related to me the first of the three, and her sister, Miss Mary Elwood (my mother's name was Elwood), the other two.

THE RED ROOM.

(*Narrated by Mrs. Wolfe.*)

About the year 1795 myself, then a girl of eighteen, and my elder sister, Mary, lived with our brother John at his Vicarage of Chalk in the county of D——. The patron of it was Sir Herbert Palmer, an old college friend of my brother, who resided at Chalk Priory, and was one of the chief men in the county.

Sir Herbert was married, but had no children, and his wife's youngest sister, Constance Moore, a beautiful girl of my own age, lived with them as their adopted daughter, so to say. We were very intimate, more like sisters than anything else, and I have often thought that my brother John, who was then about six-and-twenty, was in love with her. But of course such a thing as marriage was not to be thought of. Constance, as was to be expected, had many admirers, and at last she wrote to us to say that she was engaged to a very rich gentleman who lived in London, asking us at the same time to be her bridesmaids. Of course we were only too glad to be.

And this brings me to the evening before the wedding-day.

We had been invited to sleep at the Priory, because it was close to the church, whereas the Vicarage was quite a mile and a half distant. There had been a large ball that night; my brother was there, but he did not dance or play cards, and I thought he seemed

ill and out of spirits. About twelve o'clock we wished him good-night, and went to our bed-room.

It was called the Red Room from the colour of the paper on the walls and the crimson curtains of the huge mahogany four-post bedstead, which, with its piled-up mattress and feather bed, was so high that it required, and had, a little step wherewith to mount to the top. The room, however, looked very cheerful with its lighted candles and the blazing fire that cast its ruddy glow into the farthest corners of the otherwise sombre apartment.

Lady Palmer's own maid had been sent by her mistress to wait upon us, but we dispensed with her services, for we wished to be alone to talk over the incidents of the evening, and the great event that was coming off next day. So we sent her away, and, locking the door upon her that we might not be interrupted, got ready for bed; then, sitting down in two comfortable arm-chairs before the fire, indulged ourselves in talk such as was to be expected from two high-spirited, somewhat giddy and extremely happy girls.

All at once the Priory clock boomed forth the hour.

"Kate!" exclaimed my sister, "there's one o'clock, I declare. Let us get to bed, or we shall never be up in the morning. What's *that?*" she immediately added.

"What?" I asked.

"Why, that noise by the door!"

Our room, I must tell you, was made up of two apartments thrown into one, but only half of the wall had been taken down, its place being supplied by a curtain of some thick material, so that the door could not be seen from where we sat.

I listened, and looked in the direction of the door. There certainly was a sound, something between a sob and a sigh; and with that sound another seemed to be mingled, like a smothered tread of someone walking gently across the carpet so as to avoid being heard.

"Look, Kate! Look at the curtain! It moves!" exclaimed my sister in great agitation.

I looked at the curtain. It presented the appearance of the sail of a ship filled by a sudden breeze.

"It's only the wind under the door," I said, affecting a courage I by no means felt. "Come, get into bed at once," and I set her the example, passing by the curtain, and getting on the stool near that I might do so.

I gave the curtain one hurried, careful glance. It seemed to move as though a hand behind it was about to draw it back. I sprang into bed, expecting my sister to follow me; but she did not. We were both cowards, but she was a greater coward than I. Yet sometimes the most timid are impelled by their very alarm to rush at danger as if under some awful fascination. I saw my sister walk up to the curtain, draw it aside, and go behind it.

She did not reappear—not then, at least. I called her, but she did not answer. Then the curtain was drawn back, but gently, as though parted by the wind blowing through the open door, and a face looked out upon me from between the folds. Then the curtain parted more, and a figure appeared. It was not my sister Mary, but a pale face, with glassy, staring eyes of one dressed in a shroud.

I swooned away : how long I remained unconscious I cannot tell. I was aroused by feeling the counterpane being dragged, as though someone were trying to remove it.

I looked around, hardly daring to do so for fear of what might meet my gaze ; but it was only my sister that I saw, though, for a moment, dressed in her nightgown as she was, and with a face as pale as that of a corpse, I fancied it was the Being I had seen before. Poor Mary was at the foot of the bed, making frantic but vain endeavours to get into it. For a few moments I could do nothing but watch her. At last, when she approached the side where I lay, I gave her my hand, and with my help and her own efforts she succeeded. We put our arms round each other's necks, as though for mutual protection, and so remained for a long while—all night, it seemed—without speaking a word. We dared not.

At last my sister spoke ; but it was in a whisper so faint that I could hardly hear her.

"Did you see anything, sister Kate?" she asked.

I don't think a voice could sink to a fainter whisper than mine did when at last I replied : "Yes ; I saw brother John, dressed in his grave-clothes, looking at me from the curtain."

"I saw him too. He wanted me to follow him, but I wouldn't. And he's there still—behind the curtain."

She shuddered as she spoke with a convulsion that made her tremble from head to foot. We spoke no more, until a hurried knocking at the door roused us from a fitful kind of slumber into which we had fallen.

I got up—my sister dared not, even then—and moved towards the curtain. I think I never have felt such repugnance at anything as I did at drawing back that curtain. The daylight entering the room only through the crevices of the shutters, and even then to a great degree excluded by the curtains drawn before the windows, imparted a strange and ghostly effect to the surrounding objects.

But repeated knocks at the door determined me ; and tearing aside the thick curtain, I unlocked the door and admitted Lady Palmer, who was in tears and much agitation.

I saw at once that she was the bearer of bad news. I knew what it was before she opened her lips, and surprised her very much by telling her so. My brother John was dead ; I was sure of it ; and I was right. Going home in the dark, he had missed the way, and falling into the river that flowed through the park, had been drowned. I have his watch now ; it has never been touched or wound-up since

it was taken from his body: *it had stopped at a few minutes to one*, and so records the exact time of his fatal immersion.

Of course this caused a delay to the wedding; a very fortunate circumstance for Constance Moore; for soon afterwards the gentleman she would otherwise have married was discovered to be such a thoroughly worthless character that the engagement was ended at once. She afterwards married a very different person, and was as happy as such a nice girl deserved to be.

A STRANGE DREAM.

(Narrated by Miss Mary Elwood.)

At the close of last century the Reverend James Elwood Bullen held the Vicarage of St. James's, Cheltington, one of our most fashionable inland watering places: he was also a magistrate, and very rich, and was much looked up to by the good folk of the city where he lived. On his mother's side he was my first cousin; and, at the time of which I am speaking, was a widower with two daughters, Gertrude and Mabel, of whom the former was engaged to a Captain Rice, of the East India Company's service.

As in the story which my sister, Mrs. Wolfe, has told you the remarkable affair happened immediately before a wedding, so it was in the one I am about to relate.

Paragon House, Mr. Bullen's residence, was filled with guests, amongst whom were several of Gertrude Bullen's schoolfellows, whom she had promised to ask to her wedding; so here they now were, blooming and beautiful as a bunch of roses.

Amongst these was one they called Biddy, though her real name was Jane—Jane Johnson. She was a pale-faced, dark-eyed girl, rather absent in her manner and sulky in her temper; but she had a gift—it ran in her family, she told us—of dreaming dreams that came true.

One night, for instance (so Gertrude Bullen told me), Biddy dreamed that she saw a skeleton walk into the dormitory at school where she slept, and stopping at the foot of the bed next to her own, turned the sheet down, and lay side by side with poor little Polly Jones, putting its bony arms round the child's small neck. And within a fortnight poor Polly lay in her coffin, dead of scarlet fever.

On the morning before the wedding-day, the breakfast-table at Paragon House was crowded with a party unusually gay and lively: Miss Johnson was the last to appear.

Mr. Bullen did not approve of elders being kept waiting even by young ladies, so it was somewhat reprovingly that he greeted her.

"I hope you slept well last night, Miss Johnson," he said.

"Yes, sir, thank you," she replied; "at least, pretty well; only—" and here she stopped.

"Only what?" demanded more than one questioner.

"Well, I had a dream, if you must know," she said rather reluctantly, yet a little proud of her gift too, I thought.

"Oh, don't tell us your horrid dreams, please," protested little Hettie Bellairs, really frightened, though she spoke laughingly. She had been poor Polly Jones's bosom friend, five years ago.

"I hope you haven't been dreaming about me, Biddy," said one girl rather mockingly.

"Or me, either," said another in the same way.

"Or me," chorused her school companions.

"It isn't likely," she retorted, rather contemptuously. "I don't think enough about you to dream of you much; but I *did* dream of you a little, all the same."

"Did you? Won't you tell us?" said the first of the girls who had spoken, and whose name, by-the-by, was Carruthers.

"No, I won't," she said bluntly.

"Keep your rubbishing dreams to yourself, then," was the reply, so rudely made that Miss Johnson's dark face was lit up with anger.

"Hush! young ladies; let us have no quarrelling," said a gentleman who sat next to Mr. Bullen. He was his cousin, and, like him, a clergyman, being the Rev. Simon Elwood, only surviving son of old John Elwood. He was a short, thick-set man, with little legs, but of an aspect so stern and commanding that anyone but a fool would think twice before he meddled with him; with his tongue, at least. He had an ungovernable temper when anything roused him, and it didn't take much to do that. He had come to Cheltington to perform the marriage ceremony.

As he spoke the young ladies ceased to wrangle, and left the subject that had caused the altercation; but when they got together by themselves their talk went quickly back to Miss Johnson's dream.

The girls began by an examination—the fiftieth or so—of the dresses they were to wear on the following day. Now Miss Johnson was poor; so poor that she could not afford a new dress, but had had her best one surreptitiously turned by a Cheltington milliner, and was hourly expecting it. Gertrude Bullen, however, was in the secret, and I am afraid had confided it to Maria Carruthers, her bosom friend, the girl with whom Miss Johnson had had the short but angry discussion.

"Has your dress come home yet, Biddy?" inquired Miss Carruthers, with a very wise look.

"Hush, Molly," whispered Gertrude Bullen, with a manner of conscious guilt.

Miss Johnson looked at them both and perfectly understood what had happened.

"No, it hasn't," she said; "and, what's more, I don't care if it doesn't come, for it won't be wanted."

"Won't be wanted!" I could not help exclaiming. "What do you mean? Are you not going to the wedding to-morrow?"

"No; nor are any of you. There will be no wedding; and Gertrude Bullen will die an old maid."

Having delivered herself of these remarks, Miss Johnson sat down in a manner utterly defiant of the company, and listened quite unmoved to the retorts of her young companions.

"Oh, indeed," began Maria Carruthers, "so that's your precious dream, is it? And what else did you dream, pray? Perhaps as Captain Rice isn't going to marry Gertrude, he has fallen in love with you?"

"No, he hasn't, and I would not have him if he had," retorted Miss Johnson angrily. "But Mr. Bullen will turn him out of the house, and that old crosspatch parson Elwood as well, and will never speak to either of them again. Yes, that's my dream. You wanted to know it, and now you've heard it I hope you like it."

Having finished her remarks, she walked out of the room, leaving her school-companions in a state of consternation not to be described.

It was four o'clock p.m., dinner was over at Paragon House, and the ladies, having had their customary glass of port, had just left for the drawing-room, when the handle of the dining-room door was turned and Mabel Bullen, a girl of seventeen, entered.

Now there was a long-established custom at Cheltington—and elsewhere, very likely—that a gentleman might, if he chose, claim a kiss from a young lady if she came back to the dining-room.

Amongst the guests there that afternoon was a young gentleman who had known Mabel Bullen from childhood, and had grown to be very fond of her. His name was Harry Topham; he was articled to one of the chief solicitors in Cheltington, was as handsome and gentlemanly a young fellow of nineteen as you could wish to see, and Mabel Bullen was as fond of him as he was of her. They had sat next each other at dinner, and had been so engrossed in one another's company that they had not noticed Mr. Bullen's obvious displeasure. For, for the first time, his parental eyes were opened to the fact that this penniless young man had had the audacity to fall in love with his daughter, and not only that, but to show it also.

Therefore, when he saw her come back, and, going up to Harry's chair, address him in a whisper, he looked as black as a thunder-cloud. But Harry looked and felt delighted: for he had secreted her pocket-handkerchief in the hope that, missing it, she would return for it and so he might claim the penalty. And perhaps for the same reason she had allowed it to be purloined.

"I want my handkerchief, Harry," she said. "I must have dropped it under my chair."

"Yes, you did: I found it, and put it in my pocket," he said, with a bright look shining in his eyes.

"Give it me, please," she said.

"Certainly," he replied as he produced it; "but I must have the forfeit, you know."

She laughed and blushed, but she didn't resist, unless by saying "what nonsense" is resisting: so he was proceeding to take it when the loud, angry voice of Mr. Bullen stopped him.

"For shame, Mr. Topham! I won't allow it; give the girl her handkerchief and let her be off," he exclaimed.

"But, sir——" pleaded Harry, loath to lose his kiss.

"Hold your tongue, sir," vociferated Mr. Bullen. "And as for you, Mabel, if you don't do as I tell you, I'll send you to bed this instant, and turn the key on you."

As he spoke he brought his fist down on the table with such force that it caused the poor girl to rush from the room at once. But it did more than that, for it upset a portion of Mr. Simon Elwood's port wine over his coat sleeve and ruffles, and thereby somewhat roused his temper. Now when cousin Simon was angry he could speak in a very offensive way, and the simplest expletives became, as they fell from his lips, very exasperating.

"Pish!" he exclaimed, irritably, as he wiped the wine from his coat with his napkin.

"What do you mean by 'pish,' cousin Simon?" demanded Mr. Bullen.

"Pish—h—h!" ejaculated Mr. Elwood, more contemptuously, if possible, than before.

"Did you 'pish' at me, cousin Elwood?" asked Mr. Bullen.

"Pshaw! what's the harm of a boy kissing a girl he's known since he was in frocks, and has kissed a score of times before, I'll be bound," exclaimed cousin Simon.

"Really, Elwood, I don't want to quarrel with you, and in my own house too; but I cannot allow such indecent talk as this, and I must beg you to stop it," said Mr. Bullen, in a loud voice, and in a very dictatorial manner, neither of which could Mr. Elwood easily brook.

"Indecent talk, Bullen!" cousin Elwood flamed out; "it's only a man of nasty ideas who could see anything improper in a boy kissing a girl under these circumstances. The custom is as old as Cheltington, and you've practised it a score of times yourself, I've no doubt. You've made a mountain out of a molehill, as you usually do; so now let's change the subject, and drink the health of the bride and bridegroom."

But Mr. Bullen was not to be so put down.

"Call me a man of nasty ideas!" he raved. "Me, a clergyman, a magistrate, and the father of grown-up daughters, because I don't choose to have a whipper-snapper of a lawyer's clerk make love to my daughter before my face! It's a good thing I'm a clergyman and a magistrate, or I'd soon show him, and you too, for the matter of that, that I'm not the man to be insulted in my own house with impunity."

"Keep your temper, Bullen, or you'll be saying what you'll be sorry for," said Mr. Elwood, with forced calmness; but within he was of a white heat with rage. The other subsided into a tone and manner of fierce banter.

"*You* tell me to keep my temper! That's a good joke, if ever there was one. I wish that poor meek wife of yours was in the room to hear you say it, and those unfortunate children, who daren't call their lives their own when you're in the house, and are never happy but when your back is turned. *You* ask me to keep my temper, do you? Don't talk of temper to me, I beg."

Mr. Elwood's complexion now became of an ashen grey tint, and his large, well-shaped nose trembled ominously of a coming outbreak.

"You've had too much wine, Mr. Bullen," he said, "and you don't know what you're saying; but as I don't want to be insulted any more, I'll beg leave to go to my hotel. You can send me your apology when you've come to your senses, and I shall be willing to receive it, and overlook what you have said."

Mr. Elwood rose as he spoke, and moved towards the door. Mr. Bullen replied by ringing the bell furiously.

"Atkins," he said, as soon as the butler entered, "show Mr. Elwood into the street, and if he calls again don't let him in. If you do, you leave my service; remember that."

"Sir!" cried Mr. Simon Elwood in a tone now hoarse with rage, "you have grossly, wantonly insulted me. You need not fear my coming here, for I will never, knowingly, speak to or see you again as long as I live."

He then walked into the hall, opened the front door for himself, and went into the street, and in the silence that fell upon the company, his retreating footsteps were heard till they died away in the distance. As may readily be supposed, all the guests felt extremely uncomfortable, some of them, too, not a little indignant with their host. Among these was Captain Rice, and he felt rather angry with himself, too, for not having interfered, by so much as a word, when Mr. Elwood was, so to say, turned out of the house. It seemed as if he had been showing the white feather, and being displeased with himself, he naturally felt angry with other people, especially with Mr. Bullen. Mr. Bullen noticing it and divining the cause, felt angry with him. Now, when two people feel angry with each other a little matter will precipitate a quarrel.

"Well, Rice?" he said in a tone as of challenge.

"Well, sir?" retorted Captain Rice, looking up defiantly, as the other thought.

"That's not a very civil answer, I think, especially for a military man," remarked Mr. Bullen.

"It's as civil an answer as yours was a question," retorted the Captain.

"You forget to whom you are talking, I think, Captain Rice."

"I am not the only person who has done that this evening, sir."

"Ha! I see; you're backing up that fellow in his impudence, are you? Take care, Captain Rice; you'll repent it."

"I know what I mean, Mr. Bullen, and I am not afraid to say it, either," was the calm rejoinder. "You used language to Mr. Elwood just now which you should not have done, and which I, as a gentleman and an officer, should not have listened to without at least a protest."

"Have you finished your remarks?" interrupted Mr. Bullen, with mock politeness.

"Nearly. I only wish to add that I am going now to offer my apologies to Mr. Elwood for the treatment he has received in this house." Having finished, he rose to leave the room.

"Don't trouble yourself to return, Captain Rice; I shall not expect you," said Mr. Bullen, enigmatically.

"I don't understand," faltered the poor Captain, unwilling to believe what the other meant.

Mr. Bullen vouchsafed no immediate reply. He walked to a bureau, whence he produced a bulky document tied round with red tape. It was a marriage settlement deed, by which Captain Rice would become the possessor of ten thousand pounds. There was no need to tell the Captain what it was, for he had seen it and signed it only that afternoon.

"Leave this room now, as you propose," said Mr. Bullen, speaking in his most magisterial manner; "pay the visit you have spoken of, and the moment you cross the threshold of that door, I throw this document into the fire; if, after that, my daughter chooses to marry you, it will be without a penny and with her father's curse. Now, go or stay, as you like."

Captain Rice looked at his intended father-in-law steadfastly, but with withering contempt. Then he turned on his heel and walked out into the hall, and from thence into the street. At the same moment that he was putting on his hat, Mr. Bullen was thrusting the parchment into the fire, where he stirred it up with the poker till every fragment was consumed.

You may guess the sequel. Gertrude Bullen never married Captain Rice; in fact, she never married anyone; but her sister Mabel did, and she and her husband, who of course was Harry Topham, made a home for her. Never forgetting how, though all unwillingly, they had shipwrecked the happiness of her life, they strove to recompense her by the most tender affection and care. She was very happy in their love, and in that of their children too; and still more in the good works to which she gave herself; among which must be reckoned what she did for poor Biddy, who made an unfortunate marriage, and was left with a sick husband and a large family of children. They would all have starved, or gone to the work-

house, but for Gertrude Bullen. As it was, they were helped in every way, and all of poor Biddy's children that are now living are doing well; and dear Gertrude Bullen found a source of happiness in their prosperity and grateful devotion which never failed as long as she lived.

THE MYSTERIOUS HORSEMAN

(Narrated by Miss Mary Elwood.)

My uncle, John Elwood, though only a linendraper, came of an old Oxfordshire family, and his coat of arms may be seen in Dr. Plot's history of that county. Though, to say, only a tradesman, he was a man of such unimpeachable integrity and high principles, on which he invariably acted, that he was regarded, not only with respect, but with honour. People forgot the shop, and thought only of the man and his lineage. He carried on his business in the High Street, Oxford, and you would be surprised if I were to speak to you of the great people who would come and join in his early dinner in his little parlour. A frequent guest there was Lord North, the great Prime Minister, who would sit with his blue ribbon of the Garter, and drink his bottle of port with my uncle as though they were equals. But all this is by the way. My uncle's parlour opened right into the street, with which it communicated by a door and a flight of stone steps. The upper portion of the door was glass, so that, sitting in the parlour, or hall (whichever you like to term it), you could see what passed in the street outside. The family took their meals there, and treated it as a sitting-room in every respect.

My uncle's family consisted of two sons and two daughters. Simon, the eldest son, was then an undergraduate at T—— College; James, or Jim, as he was called, was at sea in a West India merchantman. The two daughters, Lucy and Eliza, were both at home; being unmarried, they kept their father's house; and I was on a visit at the time when the incident occurred of which I am going to tell you.

James Elwood was his father's favourite, but he was a sad scapegrace in all sorts of ways, and had all the vices common to sailors of that period, including, I am sorry to say, a decided love for strong liquor; so that even his father thought that the less he was at home the better. But like most sailors that I have known, he was very honest and honourable; of a generous disposition, always ready to lend or give as he might be asked. He never said "No" when he could say "Yes." Unlike the Elwoods, he was very handsome; tall and erect, as nimble as a stag, with the grand look of an old cavalier. Cousin James had, at the time of my visit, been absent three years; and, for all that was known of him, he might be away three more. It was towards the end of autumn that I paid my visit, and on the third or fourth day after my arrival we were all sitting in the parlour over our tea, about four o'clock in the afternoon, when we were appalled—I

can use no weaker word—by a sudden darkness that seemed to descend upon us in a moment. Then there followed a loud crash of thunder right overhead, and a bursting sound, or roar, such as I have never heard in all my life.

"It's the Day of Judgment come at last!" exclaimed Uncle Elwood in awe-struck tones, as he rushed to the window and looked out upon the street. We all followed him, believing what he said was true; at least I did, I know. I quite expected as I rushed to the window to see the dead people from the neighbouring graveyard walking up and down the High Street in their shrouds. As I approached the window, I heard them quite plainly, or seemed to do so; and by the sound, a mighty concourse filled the street. Yet it was only the rain! How it did come down! To say one would have got wet through in a moment is to say little or nothing.

No human being could have stood up under it. It descended like a solid sheet of water, and as it fell it seemed to roar and hiss in its impatience to reach the ground. The noise it made was so great we could not hear ourselves speak. It was an awful moment, and I suppose prepared me for the sight I afterwards most clearly beheld. While we were looking out, the rain ceased *for* a moment and *in* a moment: the effect of the sudden and complete silence was awful in the extreme. I quite expected it to be the prelude of the Judgment, and listened, I assure you I did, quite believing that the Lord Jesus would immediately appear. And then there came a clap of thunder that seemed to split the house from top to bottom followed in an instant by a flash of lightning that lit up the entire street, and then the rain descended as before.

But I had no eyes for the storm just then. My attention was entirely absorbed by the figure of a man on horseback who seemed to spring out of the flash of lightning. He rode at full gallop down the street, but I did not hear the sound of his horse's hoofs. Either I was not listening or the surrounding noises drowned it. His face was covered, and he was dashing down the street at his utmost speed, with an obvious desire of getting out of the storm as soon as possible.

We all gathered at the door to see him pass. As he neared the house he turned his bridle, and rode so close up to the door that the nose of the horse seemed to press against the glass. I noticed with surprise that neither man nor steed bore any trace of the drenching storm, but were perfectly dry. As he reached us the horseman uncovered his face and, to our amazement, we recognised cousin James Elwood. But he looked pale and ghastly, as though the storm had scared him. Before we could speak to him or open the door, he was gone, and dashing away again, had turned the corner of the street.

We all saw him and knew him; we expected him to return all that evening, but he never came.

The following day we heard that the ship in which he had been second mate—the *Alnwick Castle*—had floated into Bristol Dock, but without a soul on board. A storm had overtaken them entering the Channel; and the crew, together with the captain and officers, including poor Jim, had taken to the boats. They had been hailed by a passing vessel that sailed close to them, but they were all drunk, and refused to take any notice. The boats were picked up, but none of the bodies of the crew were ever seen again. So far as could be made out, cousin Jim Elwood must have been drowned at the very time when the mysterious horseman rode up to the front door of Mr. Elwood's house.

Old Mr. Elwood never recovered from the shock of his son's death and his terrible end. Mr. Simon Elwood, years afterwards, could never speak, without shaking all over, of his brother's face as he saw it that afternoon. He always held to the belief that it was his spirit compelled to come as a warning to his family. In this opinion he never wavered, though he lived to be four-score. For my part I don't know what he came for, but I know that I saw him just as I have told you, and that I shall never forget his face as long as I live; no more would you if you had seen it as I did. I am an old woman, and don't understand things as the young people nowadays seem to do, but I am content to wait, and it won't be long now.

"DOMINI VOLUNTAS FIAT."

'Twas winter, and the wild wind swept
About the home that she was leaving;
Dear child, she knew not we were grieving,
As to the Father's arms she crept.

We could not hear the whisper'd call,
Or feel the loving touch and tender;
But more, far more than words can render,
Our darling realised it all.

We watch'd her till she fell asleep,
The sleep which knows on earth no waking;
God took our treasure. He is taking
Good care of all we could not keep.

THE HARVEST OF THE HEDGEROWS.

THE beauties of the English hedgerows have often been celebrated, and nothing is more attractive to us than the byeways and hedgerows of our district. You can wander for miles across fields and by hedges, now and then skirting a little brook, garrulous in babble and bright in reflection of sky and near surroundings; mounting over steps instead of turnstiles, in absolute solitude, though you are not far from one of the most frequented high-roads in the kingdom.

A few steps off it in a right-of-way, and you are in a region of unbroken quiet, save for the caw-caw of the rook, or the goo-goo-gooing of the wild pigeon, or the whirr of the partridge that has been making too free with the grain and the field-peas and beans that are in parts yet lying out in the fields, and they are off at your near approach.

The other day, with my favourite dog, I wandered by these foot-paths in one direction for a mile-and-a-half or more. The fields were now almost cleared of oats and wheat; only a little barley and beans or peas lay here and there, and all bore a very autumn-like appearance. At a favourite leafy corner of mine, I sat down almost embowered in greenery, with my feet in a dry ditch, and above me a canopy of hazels, wild bullaces, oaks, sloes and alders, with other growths, so closely intertwined that from a very little distance you would have found it hard to distinguish them.

The birds were busy, now and then breaking into a little burst of song; and a blue-tit, like a bit of blue sky, flew close past me, while the field cricket kept up a monotonous chirping; a little field-mouse, disturbed somehow by my settlement, ran up the bottom of the ditch, and engaged the attention of my dog, which at once was after it, and relieved me of his immediate presence; for he thought it game big enough to scrape after where it had disappeared from his view, and persevered in this work for a long time: presenting a parable of the life of many men, who hunt after worthless game that can never really be enjoyed; and unless they are philosophers enough to reach the conclusion that it is the pursuit and not the possession which pleases, must be very miserable indeed.

Throughout my whole way I only saw two human creatures: a woman and her child, who were gleaning in a field; the child, perhaps six years old, apparently the more intent of the two in adding to the little sheaf which lay not far off, and to which she ran as often as she had perhaps a dozen straws.

The mother had the stiff, weary walk so often seen in peasants; and her dress seemed to drag about her limbs and cling to them as

she bent down again and again and recovered herself, with a certain slow regularity and heaviness that, it may be, told of rheumatism, a weak spine, or even of occasional want.

Seen against the light as I leaned over a gate, it seemed to me that an English painter of power might have made as touching a picture of these two as Millet's *Angelus*, and without the suggestion of religious relief which he finds; for it seemed as though neither of these two ever lifted eyes to the beautiful sky, or cast a glance upon the lovely tints of hedgerow, or stood and listened intently, even for an instant, to the melodious bursts of song; but went on, with continuous mechanic regularity—pick, pick, pick, stalk by stalk, of what might prove the staff of life for a day or two before long.

You speak about the factory children of old times, with their worn faces: nothing could surpass the intent hard look of some of these country children, who nowadays have to rush from helping mother or tending baby to school, and to rush back from school to the same weary task.

The boys in this respect, under later legislation, fare far better than the girls, who can be more easily turned to account inside the house; but still, now and then, in an undergrown boy who is sent out at the earliest moment to lead a horse in ploughing, etc., you may see something of the worn looks that Mrs. Henry Wood so well painted in one of her earlier "Johnny Ludlow" papers.

And all this time a more valuable harvest was at their hand if they had had the wit to see it.

As I sat on the side of that hedgerow ditch, I put out my hand and picked as many blackberries, luscious and ripe, as I wanted, and saw that already quantities were falling off wasted; hazel-nuts were also within reach, and I ate of them as many as I wanted without stirring from where I sat, and even tasted the sloes, which were still so bitter as to make my indulgence limited. But there was enough of refreshment there to recall Thoreau's words when he speaks of the rare wines bottled up in the wild fruits by the wayside for the dusty wayfarer on which no government seeks to put a tax.

Of course the great attraction of gleaning for the country people is that they can themselves deal with their corn from first to last, till it appear on the table in the form of a home-made loaf, and immediate necessities are with them always present; but it is, after all, larger purchasing power that they want; and, were a way open to them, the wearisome effort of gleaning would soon be sought by them rather as a pleasant change and relief from other work than the serious and painful business that they now make it.

And the sight of that weary couple gleaning in the field: mother and child alike with that heavy lifting of the foot which comes of habitual treading of soft or uneven surfaces, and my own restful repast in that hedgerow ditch, greeny, sweet and softly shaded, suggested to me a movement which, with wise organisation, might

well be carried into effect for the comfort, health and happiness of not a few in future years.

The harvest of the hedgerows, in such a district as ours, how welcome and highly prized it would be if it could be gathered and transported to crowded centres and sold cheaply.

Why, then, should not somebody take up the matter, and arrange to transport numbers of London children of the slums and alleys to such places to gather the harvest of the hedgerows, and thus themselves provide a large moiety of the expense of their treat in the country? The elder children could take care of the younger ones, and they could be boarded out at a moderate sum among the more cleanly and respectable villagers and farm servants, and thus the scheme might also be made of advantage to them; for were a proper channel once established for the conveyance of such fruits to London, and their sale there in the season, many of the country children would no doubt join the strangers, and show them the way through the woods and fields. They could combine nutting and sloe-gathering with blackberrying, and not a few of the hedgerows would yield a good result both in nuts and fruit.

In such a case I am inclined to believe that the farmers would be quite willing to allow the children the run of their field-sides, just as they willingly allow the run of their fields to gleaners who are known to them.

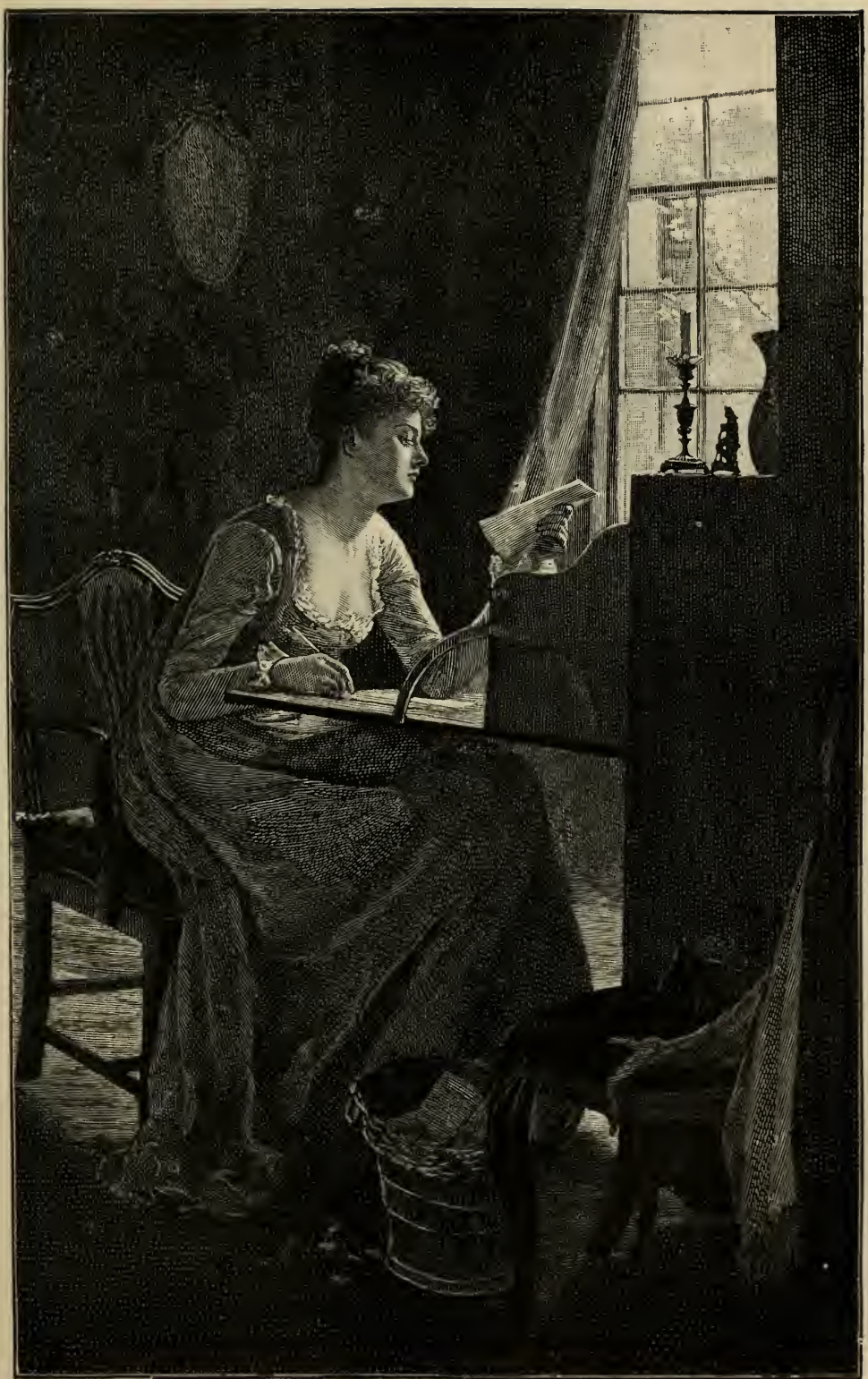
The thing could be applied to other districts; and in the region of the Surrey Hills much could be done in the gathering of the sweet and healthful whortleberries (*Hurts* as the labouring people call them there), which are often prescribed for invalids and would be welcome in infirmaries and hospitals, and which are spread thickly over large areas on these hills. They sell easily at fourpence the quart in London now, and many tons of them must go annually to waste ungathered.

Hours in the morning or evening could be devoted to hunts for mushrooms—a commodity fitted to furnish the most salutary and nourishing food in many forms, and scores of tons of which every day in autumn go to waste over the land for want of timely pickers in woods and meadows manifold.

The scheme, if properly organised (and vicars and rectors of parishes could furnish valuable aid), could not, in our idea, fail to be a success.

And even if, to some small extent, it failed in a commercial point of view, how could the children possibly have enjoyed a better outing engaged in healthy and useful work, if the weather were even ordinarily good? They would thus be kept out-of-doors with a purpose, and without the possibility of wearying, as town-bred folks (children not excepted) are so very apt to do after the first effect of freshness and novelty has worn off.

ALEX. H. JAPP, LL.D.



R. S. V. P.

R. S. V. P.

With thoughtful brow she ponders deep,
The grave sweet lips her secret keep;
She does not smile, and does not sigh,
While thus revolving her reply—
Yet letters four, R. S. V. P.

Ye stir within her virgin heart
Some quick'ning hope, to spring and start
Through the recesses of her mind,
And leave a sunny track behind—
Ah, letters four, R. S. V. P!

She does not hear the songs of June,
Nor note the brown bees' drowsy tune,
She does not heed the wandering breeze
Outside amongst the lilac trees,
Ah, letters four, R. S. V. P.

The drooping lashes veil her eye—
What question hangs on the reply
That dyes with rose her cheek so fair?
Will he be there—will he be there—
Ye letters four, R. S. V. P?

She cons you o'er with anxious care—
Will he be there—will he be there?
If by some magic ye could tell
How easy the reply—ah, well,
All potent power, R. S. V. P.

The die is cast, and she will go—
Methinks she will not answer no—
When with shy eyes again she stands,
Her white hands clasped by other hands,
Confronted by—R. S. V. P!

Helen Marion Burnside.

AUNT PEN.

By Mary Grace Wightwick, Author of "Mrs. Carr's Companion."

I.

"MY dear, I told you it would never do to neglect Aunt Penelope. She has actually written asking Mona to go and stay with her."

"Mona! *Mona!* who is not one bit nearer to her than our own girls! Besides, your aunt's an invalid—a hermit: sees no one, goes nowhere!"

"On the contrary, her health has improved. She says she feels better than at any time these last twenty years."

"You don't say so! And I thought her eighty thousand pounds as good as in the children's pockets."

"More likely to be in Mona's, from all I can see," said Mr. Hyde moodily. "She writes me three sheets, asking a dozen questions about 'her dear nephew Philip's child.' Now that Aunt Pen is stronger and able to give up recluse habits, she intends to see a little society, and means to begin by making acquaintance with her grand-niece, Mona. I suppose I must fix a day for her journey into Wales?"

"You will do no such thing!" snapped his wife. "I've thought of a better plan. It's really *too* provoking! I've always supposed Aunt Pen's twenty years' illness *could* only end in one way; and it seems scarcely fair for people to deceive their relations by pretending to be confirmed invalids when they are nothing of the kind. But as she *has* chosen to recover, there is only one thing to be done, Mr. Hyde: we must ask her here."

"Ask her *here*, my dear?"

"Ask her *here*," repeated Mrs. Hyde, firmly. "It will be easy enough to trump up some excuse for refusing her invitation to Mona; and that she may not be disappointed, we will ask her to come and spend a month with us and make her acquaintance. Once here, Mr. Hyde, you can judge for yourself whether a chit like Mona is likely to stand in the way of girls like my Lou and Flossie."

Besides a mixed nursery-full of little ones, more or less in the pinafore-stage of existence, Mr. and Mrs. Hyde, of Carolside, numbered among their flock two daughters, now standing with anything but "reluctant feet" upon the verge of maidenhood. Lou was nearly eighteen; Flossie a year younger. Mrs. Hyde's motherly cares were just now also extended for a few months to a young cousin of her husband's, the before-mentioned Mona, who paired in age with her own Flossie. We may be sure this astute chaperon

had good reasons for sheltering under her wing such an undesirable fledgeling as pretty penniless Mona Hyde, who, as it happened, had one desirable possession in life—a fascinating and eligible step-brother. Jack Tracy was just now on the Continent, travelling with a friend for two or three months before returning to make a home in England for his little step-sister; and meantime Mrs. Hyde was earning his lasting gratitude, and a good chance for Lou or Flossie in the near future, by inviting Mona, whose school-life at Bonn had just come to an end, to spend the interval at Carolside.

Tracy, perhaps, might have gone through life with more comfort and less persecution from manœuvring mothers, had not fate decreed him presumptive heir to an Irish Peerage. The peerage was old; so old that it had already reached the stage of decay, judging by the feebleness and infirmity of its upholders; yet still the Earls of Portpatrick (having nothing much else to boast of) prided themselves upon the inalienable privilege, dating from feudal times, of precedence in holding the stirrup for royalty whenever royalty rode abroad. And however inconvenient this heirship might be in the main, it had at least been valuable in securing for Tracy a niche in Mrs. Hyde's good graces, and a shelter for his lonely little sister under her roof.

Carolside was a comfortable, roomy old mansion, of no particular period, standing in its own well-wooded grounds. Its owner was a certain Sir Kenneth Falconer, who, finding himself at thirty bearing a burden of poverty laid upon him by many generations of spendthrift ancestors, had wisely determined to breast the tide of adverse fortune, instead of letting it overwhelm him as it had overwhelmed his father and grandfather. So very soon after succeeding to the family honours he had broken up his establishment, dismissed his servants, sold his hunters, and luckily found a tenant willing to pay a handsome rent for Carolside in the person of Mr. Hyde, a retired parson, who thought it not ignominious to enjoy life upon his wife's ample property. Mrs. Hyde's father, a noted cotton manufacturer, had bequeathed his daughter, by way of dower, a large share in his flourishing business, and a heritage of snobbism and pride of purse which harmonised ill with the stately old rooms at Carolside. But although Mrs. Hyde's bearing was not altogether patrician, her aspirations were high: in the silken surroundings of her present, she wished to forget her rough contact with cotton in the past.

The neighbourhood seemed willing to forget it too, in consideration of the pleasant little dinners and well-arranged parties by which the tenants of Carolside bid for its good graces. Yet there was one drop of gall in Mrs. Hyde's cup of sweetness. Four months had come and gone, and Sir Kenneth Falconer, the great man of the district, had not yet paid his respects to her.

The master of Carolside, exiled from his home, had retired to Falconscliffe, a solitary tower upon the sea coast near, which had served as a dower-house to successive widowed Dames Falconer.

There, in spite of his diminished consequence, he still "held his head high, and cared for no man he."

Let us return to Carolside, roused into a flutter of preparation by Aunt Pen's expected arrival. For the invitation had been accepted, and the old lady, with her maid, her pony-carriage and her own man, was already on her way to pay them a month's visit.

When the afternoon arrived, very carefully did Mrs. Hyde marshal her forces for the inspection of Aunt Pen's critical eye, before herself going in her brougham to meet the honoured visitor at the distant country station.

"Mona! Aren't you going to drive into Burbeck with Lou and Flossie? They will bring the Thorpes back with them for a day or two."

"No, aunt"—so she always called Mrs. Hyde—"I promised Dick to walk with him to Heatherburn Hill."

"Well, don't be late. Aunt Pen will expect to find you all here when she arrives. Dick! run up before you start and change that shabby jacket. There's everything in first impressions, so be sure you keep yourself tidy. And mind, girls, you are all back quite by four o'clock. The express is always punctual."

A glance of approval from their mother's eye rested upon Lou and Flossie's stylish holland dresses as they drove off in their low basket-carriage, and thence travelled with satisfaction of a different kind to Mona's blue cotton, at least three seasons old. Yet the girl might have worn many things more unbecoming. As she danced off with little Dick, full of life and spirits, you saw only how its pale tints set off the *mignonne* figure and dark, close-curled head above it. Mona had a book with her, and when, after a tolerably long walk and several steep climbs, they found themselves upon a brown moor, Mona threw herself down amongst the bracken and was soon deep in her story. Mrs. Hyde's warnings were disregarded while Mona read on and Dick chased butterflies until four strokes suddenly clanged out from the great stable-clock of Falconscliffe, whose grey tower frowned grimly on the landscape a half-mile away between land and sea. Thereupon Dick, running up in haste, roused Mona from her abstraction into dismayed activity.

"Oh, Dick! It is nearly an hour's walk! What will your mother say?" Dick's shrug of the shoulders was small consolation.

"It would save time to cross the stream by the stepping-stones instead of going round; wouldn't it, Dick?"

Dick hailed this as a good idea, and after a quick run across the moor and a scramble down the rocky hill-side, the cousins reached the brink of the little beck brawling down from the heights.

"It is a good deal swollen by the rains," said Mona, doubtfully; "but I think we can manage it if I hold up my dress."

She gathered her skirts together, and, with laudable caution, stepped from rock to rock, Dick springing before her like a young chamois.

She shouted to him to be careful, for the wild waters swirled almost on a level with their stony causeway, but in a minute he had landed on the other side and was laughing at her fears.

She followed, reassured; two more springs would have seen her high and dry, when suddenly with a rush an enormous deerhound bounded up from behind, and startled, she slipped, lost her footing and found herself up to the waist in water.

She was close to the bank; but ere she could scramble out, a voice said pleasantly: "Allow me," two hands seized hers and she was lifted dripping and mud-encrusted on to the rocky bank.

"It was my dog's fault, I'm afraid. He is so boisterous!" said the new-comer, ruefully contemplating the result as he raised his hat. Mona's pretty pale skirt was dripping and disfigured with mud and slime, her gloves were wet and torn, her boots covered with a coating of mud to the ankle.

"You do look a pretty object!" cried Dick, more truthful than consoling.

"I really am so awfully sorry," said the voice again—a pleasant voice; and then Mona, looking up in bewildered confusion, saw that the author of her misfortune was a gentleman in shooting-coat and dark tan gaiters, whose frank blue eyes looked the remorse he felt.

"What can I do to help you? Falconscliffe is not far off; will you go there and—and make yourself tidy?"

"No; oh, no! let us get home at once, please."

"Certainly, if you prefer it; but where is your hat?"

Where indeed but swirling away in mid-stream, caught by the swift current and already well on its way seaward! Dick was the first to perceive and point it out with a shout of dismay.

"I shall have to do without it," said Mona in despair. "Come, Dick, we shall make things no better by lingering."

"Tie this scarf over your head," suggested the stranger, pointing to Mona's blue silk neckerchief; "and—excuse me—are you lame?"

"I seem to have hurt my foot somehow," said Mona reluctantly, clutching at Dick for support; "perhaps it will go off presently."

She limped a few paces over the rough ground trying to conceal the pain every step caused her, but was obliged to give up and thankfully accept the help the stranger offered. Thoroughly subdued by her misfortunes, Mona was thankful for the strong arm which at last almost carried her up the bank. She flashed him a look of gratitude out of her dark eyes as he made her rest for a minute upon a heap of stones.

"And now what is to be done? Is your home far off?" seeing that Mona looked to him for counsel.

"At Carolside."

He gave a slight start and looked more attentively at the small cavalier and the forlorn damsel, who reminded him irresistibly of

some maimed and drooping summer insect with the tender down brushed from its wings and all its radiance gone.

"It's a long way there. Ha! a good thought! Bob Wilson's cart! It should pass about this time—and here by good luck it comes. He is just back from Wildfell Market, and provided he has sold all his vegetables there will be plenty of room." Mona's good friend stopped the small boy approaching at the best jog-trot of an old pony homeward-bound; and, having ascertained that the garden-stuff was disposed of, arranged for Mona and Dick to take its place in the jolting market-cart, which Mona hailed with joy as a relief from their difficulties.

"Oh, thank you so much!" and again the dark eyes were lifted gratefully to his. "I don't know what Dick and I would ever have done without you! It would not have mattered so much but for Aunt Pen's coming. However, it can't be helped; *you* at least have done all you could; good-bye." She gave him her hand with childish simplicity and nodded with a grave smile as the cart jolted away towards Carolside, leaving him looking after them, bareheaded, with a puzzled expression on his good-looking face.

"Not altogether one's idea of a fabric of *cotton* manufacture! Perhaps I have been foolishly prejudiced," was his inward comment. "Well! I must make an effort—call at Carolside and make amends."

II.

At last the house came in sight, and Mona peremptorily bade the driver turn aside to the back entrance. Thence she hoped unobserved to slip across the hall and gain her own room by a side staircase. The driver helped her down, and with pain and difficulty Mona, still holding by Dick, managed to limp along the stone passages to a swing-door leading into the hall. All seemed silent, and they ventured through. But, alas! the culprits were barely midway, when suddenly the drawing-room door opened, and a little troop of people flocked out, barring their further passage. They could neither go forward nor retreat unseen. Acres of polished flooring seemed to lie between Mona and any hiding-place.

"Why, Mona! what have you been doing with yourself?"

Her aunt's sharp, penetrating voice called attention to the fugitives. Conscious of her untidy hair and dishevelled appearance, Mona stood at bay in her dark corner, fervently wishing herself back on the banks of the stream—or *in* it, for that matter.

"This is Mona, Aunt Pen," said Mrs. Hyde, with a careless wave of the hand towards where the poor girl stood, blushing and confused.

"So this is Mona! And pray what has she been doing to make herself in such a deplorable condition?" asked Aunt Pen, examining her critically.

"Explain yourself, Mona," commanded Mrs. Hyde majestically:

adding, with a shrug of her ample shoulders: "Always in some scrape or other."

The Fates had favoured her to-day, and Mrs. Hyde would have been more than mortal if she had not experienced a glow of satisfaction as Mona faltered out a brief explanation of their delay and the disaster, whose effects were so plainly visible, while little Dick added in his shrill treble: "And she couldn't walk, so the strange gentleman helped her up the bank and sent us home in the cart."

"The gentleman!" cried Mrs. Hyde. "I trust no friend of mine saw you in that plight!"

"It was no one we knew. I had never seen him before," pleaded Mona, hoping to make matters better.

"What! You have been making acquaintance indiscriminately with a stranger? Really, Mona, I can't trust you out of my sight! So particular as I am, too!" And Mrs. Hyde launched into a lecture, in which little laudations of her own watchfulness and upbraidings of Mona were about equally mixed.

Mona stood abashed. She had exhausted her defence, and could only listen in respectful silence, until Aunt Pen said coldly: "I think we have heard enough. Mona had better go upstairs and make herself tidy. Did you say the pictures you wished to show me were in the dining-room, Mrs. Hyde?"

The possessor of eighty thousand pounds could speak with the voice of authority in that house. Mrs. Hyde turned to her guest, all smiles, and the party swept on without vouchsafing another look at Mona, who thankfully limped away as best she might. Her foot was growing more and more painful; she was shivering with the drive in her wet clothes, and was so weary that she ventured to send a message of excuse to her aunt instead of going down to dinner.

The evening wore on: gay sounds of dance music began presently to steal up from the hall; the maids were probably looking on at the fun. Disconsolate, mortified and chilled to the bone, Mona crept to bed at last, full of self-pity, and hoping to find relief in sleep from pain, mental and physical. But her injured ankle was now taking its revenge for all her ill-treatment, and throbbed and ached without ceasing as she lay, now at fever-heat, now shivering with cold, while the gay music below beat upon her tired ears with aggravating monotony hour after hour; so it seemed to the weary listener, whose sole distraction was the reviewing, again and again, the mortifications of that wretched afternoon.

Presently there was a tap at the door, and in answer to Mona's faint "Come in," there entered a little old lady, in black, and an elderly maid carrying a candle, who remained respectfully standing near the door, while her mistress advanced to the bedside. Poor Mona's senses were so dazed with pain and fatigue, that it took her a minute or two to identify the upright form, severe, clear-cut features and piercing blue eyes with those of the dreaded Aunt Pen.

The vision naturally did not tend to reassure her. She lay silent, gazing at her visitor with wide-open, frightened eyes.

"Is anything the matter, child? My maid tells me she heard sounds as though someone were in pain; her room is next to yours."

"It's my ankle," said Mona, piteously. "It aches and burns so that I cannot sleep."

"Let me see," said Aunt Pen. Without even waiting to remind Mona it was her own fault—as Mrs. Hyde certainly would have done—Aunt Pen called her maid to hold the candle while she herself examined the injured foot. Even such gentle pressure made Mona wince.

"Not sprained, but the muscles are strained probably. We must try and doctor it. Griffiths and I have plenty of practice among our poor people, and understand such things. Griffiths! bring my little medicine chest." Then, as her handmaid glided away: "Has no one been near you, child? Why didn't you ring?"

"I did, three times; but perhaps the servants are busy; no one came."

"H'm! a pretty thing, indeed! Have you had nothing to eat, pray?"

"I didn't want any dinner; I felt so cold and shivery."

"And are you shivering still?" Aunt Pen laid a cool hand on Mona's burning brow, and answered her own question. "Ah! a feverish cold. Griffiths shall get you something." For all her fear, Mona mustered courage to remonstrate.

"If you please, I would rather not make a fuss. Aunt Hyde will say it is all my own fault."

"Which is true, I suppose. Never mind now, you shall tell me all about it another time. Now, Griffiths," as the maid re-entered, "some cold water, and a roll of linen rag."

Mona felt she was in good hands, and submitted passively to Aunt Pen's gentle handling. Her very touch had comfort in it, and soothed almost as much as the cooling lotion which Griffiths quickly concocted. Mona gave a sigh of relief when she presently found herself re-arranged upon a cool pillow, with the pain in her ankle already allayed. Even then Aunt Pen was not content until she had sent Griffiths downstairs and seen her return with a cup of steaming arrowroot, which the old lady arbitrarily administered.

"There, now you will sleep, and let me hear no more groans. If you want anything more, call Griffiths. Good-night, child." She laid her hand on Mona's dark head with something between a pat and a caress, and glided away as quickly as she had come.

Mona was painfully labouring through her toilet next morning when her cousin Lou burst in upon her.

"Not ready, Mona? Why, how doleful you look! Are you ill? I thought you were shamming last night to keep out of Aunt Pen's way. What could induce you to get into such a scrape? She's

awfully particular! Snapped me up short because I didn't answer papa in quite Johnsonian language; and found fault with Dick for lounging on the sofa. I declare, you do look ill though, Mona. Get back into bed and I'll tell Lydia to bring you up some breakfast."

"Thank you; if your mother won't mind," said Mona.

"Oh! I'll make it all right with her. And, if you don't want a lecture, it's about the wisest thing you can do to lie snug for a day or two till Aunt Pen's got over it a little. But I expect you've done for yourself with her."

"It can't be helped now," said Mona dejectedly.

Curled up in an arm-chair, Mona had not long despatched her breakfast when another visitor invaded her solitude in the person of Mrs. Hyde, irate and overpowering.

"My dear Mona! What is all this I hear? I don't wish to find fault, but really your thoughtless ways are very trying, as I was telling your aunt only this morning. You quite disturbed Miss Hyde last night, and if you *are* ill, as she makes out, remember you have only yourself to thank for it. Not but what you're looking much as usual."

"It's only a cold," said Mona in the first pause.

"Oh, that's nothing! But as I hear you are lame into the bargain, it won't do you any harm to stay upstairs, and if you are dull it's entirely your own doing. Really, Mona, it is most aggravating! Your brother would be very much displeased with you. Such harum-scarum ways will make him miserable. Well, good-bye—it is so fine that the Garnetts and ourselves are all going to picnic at the Holy Well. Of course you'll have to miss it now. People must pay for their folly."

Mona sank back in her chair as the door closed, and tears of mortification sprang to her eyes. Jack displeased! Jack made miserable by her folly! This was worse than all! All her hopes and aspirations, present and future, grouped themselves round this beloved step-brother, who, to Mona at least, was the incarnation of everything great and good. Any day, any hour, might bring the welcome letter announcing his coming, or—better still—the wanderer himself. Each clang of the front-door bell louder and more imperative than usual brought Mona's heart into her mouth with joyful expectation. But if he returned only to be made miserable by his little sister's thoughtlessness ——! Oh! what could she do to cure herself of her dreamy ways—to make herself more fit to be his companion?

Presently a knock at her door was followed by the entrance of Griffiths and Griffiths's stately little mistress. The folds of Miss Hyde's rich silk dress hung from her waist severe and plain, without a crumple; her black cap and collar were adjusted to a nicety. Mona started up in confusion, but a sudden twinge from her foot made her sink back again pale with pain and a fear of her visitor, revived

by Lou's warnings. The terrible little lady's fierce blue eyes seemed to pierce her through and through. But perhaps Aunt Pen was disarmed for the present by Mona's helplessness, for she only laid a gentle hand on her niece's head and asked how she was.

"Griffiths is going to make your foot comfortable, and then, if you like, she shall help you to finish dressing."

There was only one difficulty about this last: no suitable costume seemed forthcoming for Mona's wear that morning. The pretty blue of yesterday hung limp and bespattered over a chair; Mona blushed as she looked at it. Her two remaining cottons were in the laundress's hands, as she remembered with dismay.

"Perhaps this will do?" suggested Griffiths, bringing forward a pretty cream nun's veil.

"The gathers are out, and the flounce is torn," said Mona, hanging her head guiltily. "I caught it on a bush, and forgot to mend it yesterday."

"Griffiths will mend it for you while we have a little talk together. See! I've brought my knitting, for I never waste a moment if it can be helped."

She drew a sock of soft yarn from her pocket and began to knit rapidly. Griffiths departed with the ill-used dress, and Mona waited in some trepidation for the expected scolding. Aunt Pen looked up at last, but only to say cheerfully: "And now we are alone, suppose you tell me the history of your accident yesterday. I want to know how it came about, and why Mrs. Hyde was so much displeased."

Mona flushed painfully, but the blue eyes, if kind, were imperious; and without more ado she related the afternoon's adventures.

"And the stranger who helped you—don't you know who it was?"

"No; but he was a gentleman, I'm sure; and so kind—the kindest man I ever met, except Jack."

"Your brother?"

"Yes;" and Mona's eyes kindled. "There he is! That's Jack!"

She pointed to a cabinet photo, framed in plush, of a handsome young fellow about a dozen years her senior.

"Isn't he handsome?" said Mona, enthusiastically, regarding her brother with admiring eyes; but Griffiths's timely entrance with the repaired dress interrupted her sisterly praises, perhaps to Aunt Pen's advantage.

"And now," said Aunt Pen, "now that the frock is ready, suppose you put it on. I am going to exercise my ponies after luncheon, and you may come too and get a little fresh air. A drive this lovely day won't hurt either of us, though we may not be equal to a picnic."

The prospective treat lent energy to the finishing of Mona's toilet, and when after luncheon Griffiths helped her downstairs and into the comfortable low phaeton, where Miss Hyde was already seated Mona began to think that the tide of her fortunes had turned.

The ponies sped fast and so did time, till they found themselves presently in Burbeck High Street.

"Which is the best draper's?" asked Aunt Pen. "I have a little shopping to do."

Mona directed the coachman to an imposing-looking establishment, always favoured with Carolside patronage, and Miss Hyde disappeared within it. She was gone some time, while Mona amused herself looking in the gay windows and wishing she had the wherewithal to buy some of their contents. Jack was generous, but forgetful. It was a long time now since he had remembered to replenish her purse, and eighteenpence represented her whole worldly wealth. As she looked and longed, a horseman riding down the street with slackened rein observed her curiously—hesitated—rode on—looked again—then turned his horse's head, and pulled up at her side. As he took off his hat she recognised her friend of the day before. The quick colour flushed her cheeks.

"I hope you are none the worse for your adventure yesterday, Miss Hyde? I couldn't sleep all night for thinking of my clumsiness."

"Yes—no, thank you; only a little lame," she stammered confusedly. "Please don't blame yourself. I am always unlucky."

"What a confession!" said Aunt Pen, who returned at this moment in time to catch the frank, amused smile with which the stranger greeted the remark. "Who is your friend, child?"

"My name is Falconer," he answered for himself with a bow. "I am Mr. Hyde's landlord and nearest neighbour. I was the unlucky author of Miss Hyde's accident yesterday and have just been calling at Carolside to make my peace."

"Well, sir! if my niece forgives you, I will. The adventure earned her a lecture; but I daresay she will be all the better for it."

The stranger's face fell as he glanced at Mona, scarcely knowing whether to take the brusque words in jest or earnest. Her smile reassured him. Perhaps the awe-inspiring little personage with the fierce blue eyes was less terrible to her *entourage* than she seemed.

"My conscience pricks me afresh now that I hear Miss Hyde is still lame," he said, ruefully.

"Well! People must suffer for their folly. However, I think she can manage to get across the pavement here. I want to show her my purchases. Come, child!"

Aunt Pen put out her hand to help her niece, nodding over her shoulder such a peremptory dismissal that their new acquaintance could not choose but accept it, with a farewell glance at Mona as he raised his hat and rode away. Mona's attention was quickly distracted as they entered the inner compartment of the shop, which was strewn with materials of every colour. Miss Hyde pointed to a pretty pale blue cashmere, a cream muslin and a pink cotton. "There, Mona, I hope you will like them; the dressmaker promises to have them all ready in a week; she will take your measure at once."

Mona's eyes opened wide with surprise as she faltered her thanks, hardly able to believe in this speedy fulfilment of her wishes. But while the dressmaker was busy, Aunt Pen trotted away to make other purchases, and Mona was obliged to postpone the expression of her gratitude.

"I wonder what makes you so kind to me?" ventured Mona, wistfully, when they were in the carriage again.

Aunt Pen did not answer for a few moments. Her eyes were fixed upon the summer landscape, but she was looking through and beyond it to a land that is very far off. Presently she laid her hand gently on her niece's.

"Child! I loved your father," she said quietly. "He was like a son to me."

Mona's eyes seemed to question further, though Mona herself sat touched and silent. Nothing more was said during the rest of the drive.

III.

THE radiance of triumph which illumined Mrs. Hyde's face when she returned from the picnic to find Sir Kenneth Falconer's card upon her hall-table was good to behold, and when the circumstances of his visit transpired, Mona was inwardly blessed and forgiven on the spot. Of course it was annoying that the long-desired visitor should have arrived to find them out (the girls just looking their best, too!); but Mrs. Hyde's quick brains were soon at work to remedy this misfortune. "Mr. Hyde! you must return Sir Kenneth's call to-morrow, and leave a card for our tennis-party on Friday, and an invitation to dine here afterwards."

The cup of Mrs. Hyde's satisfaction brimmed over when Mona, who felt tired after her drive and its various excitements, elected to join the schoolroom-tea instead of appearing at late dinner. This arrangement left Lou and Flossie free to display their charms unrivalled, and show that pretty deference to Aunt Pen's old-fashioned tastes which their mother had privately prompted. Flossie performed most creditably a brilliant Fantasia on *Jenny Jones*, while Lou engaged her aunt in a game of cribbage, such a recently-learned accomplishment of Lou's that the old lady could not fail to win.

No groans disturbed the visitor's rest that night; perhaps Aunt Pen before retiring made it her business to see that her young neighbour was comfortable and well cared-for.

The tennis-lawn at Carolside lay behind the house at the foot of a series of turfed terraces gay with flowers, and was fringed upon its further border by some grand old cedars which had been the pride of the Falconers for generations. Just now the well-kept greensward, the bowling-green of former days, was sprinkled with a score or two of gaily-dressed people, among whom were conspicuous Flossie and Lou Hyde in pretty tennis costumes of white and pink, wielding their

racquets with such success that they were popular partners with the half-dozen men in flannels who represented the *Cheviot Borderers*, now quartered at Burbeck Barracks.

Sir Kenneth Falconer was there too, though not in flannels. He had played a set with Lou Hyde, but with no great enthusiasm, and had then strolled away towards the cedars, under whose shadow he had espied a diminutive little person encamped upon the grass. Play was out of the question for Mona to-day, although she was so nearly well that there was no possible pretext for keeping her indoors. She was her blithe self again too, very unlike the forlorn damsel Sir Kenneth had helped out of the beck. But the recollection of that miserable day brought a blush to her cheek as Sir Kenneth drew a book from his pocket and handed it to her. It had a familiar aspect, though the bright red binding was spotted and spoiled.

"I found this next morning on a stone near where you fell; the spray had sprinkled it for hours, but it had escaped drowning."

Mona murmured her thanks in some confusion. The book would have unpleasant associations for her in future.

"I've been wondering ever since I found it," Sir Kenneth said, musingly, "what Christian name this *M.* belongs to?" and he turned to the fly-leaf and showed the *M. Hyde.* "It might stand for Margaret, or Mary?"

"It might," said Mona, demurely, "yet neither is my name."

"Of course not. Yours would be something much more uncommon and poetical; Madeleine, perhaps? or Muriel? You look rather like a Muriel."

"Then my looks belie me," said Mona gaily, quite at her ease now.

"They cannot have had the cruelty to call you Martha?"

"Why not, pray? I might have turned out the most sedate person possible for all they could tell. But don't trouble to guess any more, for I don't intend telling you what name I answer to."

"Mona!" called Aunt Pen, who, with the perpetual knitting in hand, was sitting under a garden-umbrella not far off, talking to another dowager. The colour rose from Mona's throat to her tiny ears, but she sat on, wilfully pretending not to hear.

"Mona! Mona!" Aunt Pen cried again; and this time it was out of the question to feign deafness. She rose and went unwillingly to answer her aunt's call, returning in a minute or two rather crestfallen.

"Mona is a sweet name, and suits you to perfection," was Sir Kenneth's mischievous greeting. "I prefer it to any of the others. Now tell me, is that terrible little lady who was with you the other day the Aunt Pen you spoke of?" and lowering his voice, "is she so very dreadful?"

"Not very. I'm much more afraid of Aunt Hyde," laughed Mona.

"But surely Mrs. Hyde is your mother?"

"Indeed she is not!" Mona answered indignantly.

"Your step-mother, at least?"

"Neither; Mrs. Hyde is my first-cousin's wife. I only call her aunt for convenience' sake; and Lou and Flossie, the girls in pink there, are my second cousins."

Sir Kenneth breathed a sigh of relief. "Of course, I might have guessed as much! You are so different from what I expected!"

A demure but very intelligible smile curved Mona's pretty lips.

"How funny! and *you* are so different from what *I* expected!"

"Really?"

"Falconscliffe is such a romantic-looking old place that I imagined its owner a grim, fierce, tyrannical *Front-de-Bœuf* sort of person that everyone must be afraid of, and I find you a—a——"

"An every-day young man, of the mildest possible disposition," laughed Sir Kenneth pleasantly. "But tell me, are you disappointed? did you prefer the imaginary Sir Kenneth to the real one?"

"I hardly know. No doubt it will take me a little time to get over the shock."

"I should so like to show you Falconscliffe. Couldn't you persuade Mrs. Hyde to bring you over some day?"

"*I* could not, but perhaps *you* might. It would be delightful; I have so often longed to climb that grim old tower."

"And nothing would give me greater pleasure than to see you do it. I must speak to Mrs. Hyde this evening, for she has asked me to stay and dine."

"And you will invite Lou and Flossie too? and Aunt Pen?"

"Of course. You must all come and lunch with me, and the sooner the better. I'll get Mrs. Hyde to fix a day."

"Oh, I hope she will say yes!" said Mona, clasping her hands ecstatically. Then sobering down: "There, I must go! Aunt Hyde is beckoning me to help her with the tea."

"Mayn't I come too?"

"Presently, when the cups are ready. Just now you would only be in the way."

So Sir Kenneth remained, lying *perdu* in the shade of his own ancestral cedars, lazily amused with the scraps of talk that floated to him upon the summer air.

Meantime, Aunt Pen close by was chatting now to an elderly maiden lady whom Mrs. Hyde had introduced, hoping, as she said to herself, "that the two old tabbies would amuse each other." Miss Prawle was a sworn foe to modern men and manners, and never tired of holding forth upon the delinquencies of both to anyone who would lend a willing ear. If she had been the mummy of some Egyptian queen of an early dynasty lately disinterred from an entombment of ages, Miss Prawle could scarcely have been more horrified by the sights and sounds around her. Every day, nay, every hour, brought some fresh shock to her moral system, under which her sense of propriety reeled. Sir Kenneth well knew her little weakness, and was

not surprised to hear that she had got upon the usual topic with her sympathising listener.

"The young men nowadays use such dreadful language,"—she was confiding to Aunt Pen—"and not only among themselves, but even when ladies are present. I hardly like to shock you, Miss Hyde, by repeating such language, but would you believe that when I was at Chaldicotes yesterday, looking on at the tennis (Chaldicotes is Lady Anne Hampton's place, you know), her nephew—that gentlemanly youth over there—actually shouted out '*Deuce!*' without the least disguise?"

"Shocking!" murmured Aunt Pen, who had not yet been initiated into the mysteries of lawn tennis.

"But I must say the young women are nearly as bad," lamented Miss Prawle sadly. "You see that pretty girl with the fair hair? She was also one of the players, and at first I thought her rather lady-like, but when her partner asked her some question about the score, she actually answered, 'Thirty, *love!!*' although they had only been introduced to each other that afternoon. So bold and forward of her!"

Aunt Pen nodded a horrified assent, while her bright knitting-pins chased each other diligently round their brown treadmill.

"I found afterwards that many of the other girls talked in the same way; and I was so horrified that once I said aloud 'Love! What can they mean by it?' And young Browning, who was just at my elbow, sprawling on the bank in the usual fashion nowadays, happened to overhear, and answered, coolly and grave as a judge, 'Love! Oh! that means nothing!' *Nothing!* Miss Hyde. But when I was young, love meant a great deal! It meant marriage settlements and a comfortable home in most cases. Love between two young things was a serious undertaking then; but *now*—the world seems to me just upside down!"

And Miss Prawle indignantly knitted a strand of disgust and disapproval in with the stiff yarn of her charity sock.

If, when evening came, Sir Kenneth Falconer found it painful to be received as a guest in his own ancestral halls—if he found it difficult to accept Mrs. Hyde's rather oppressive hospitality with a good grace, he did his best to conceal his feelings, inspired to the effort by a certain bewitching little face upon the opposite side of the table which attracted him irresistibly. He *talked*, it is true, to Lou Hyde, skilfully placed by her mother at his other side: but he *looked* at Mona; and if he had thought her a winsome little lady when he first made her acquaintance, emerging dripping from the beck, how much the more was she to be admired in the pretty fresh muslin and blue ribbons which she owed to Aunt Pen's generosity?

Having once broken the ice and found the plunge on the whole less disagreeable than he had expected, Sir Kenneth's appearances at Carolside became pretty frequent. His appeal to Mrs. Hyde had been successful, and with a thrill of inward gratification she had

accepted the invitation to Falconscliffe for all her party, and Thursday in the following week was fixed for the luncheon which was to cost its giver much thought and pains in the preparation.

But long before that day arrived, Sir Kenneth found many excuses for exchanging the loneliness of Falconscliffe for the sociable circle at Carolside. Mrs. Hyde was nothing if not hospitable; and had a specially hearty welcome and a knife and fork always ready for any eligible bachelor likely to develop into a Benedick. So on Sunday, when Sir Kenneth turned up at the village church—hitherto it had been his custom to stride over the moors to the little iron church at Wildfell, to avoid the pain of seeing strangers occupy his family pew—and joined Flossie afterwards, what more natural than for Mrs. Hyde to persuade him back to luncheon?

"The more the merrier, *I* say," she declared emphatically, and made Sir Kenneth feel so much at home that he prolonged his visit over supper time; and it was the moon and not the sun which lighted his walk back to Falconscliffe.

As he smoked his cigar upon the homeward way, he went over again in thought the day's experiences: the pleasant afternoon ramble through the Carolside woods; the ample tea—North-country fashion; the cheerful family-dinner and supper—it was the Hyde custom to dine early on Sunday—such a contrast to his lonely meals. And Sir Kenneth smiled to himself as he recalled a little scene which had given him an insight into the character of his hostess, and of another person also who interested him more.

The talk at early dinner had happed upon modern fashions of hair-dressing, and Miss Hyde, being appealed to by her host, gave her opinion pretty strongly, and, as might be expected, in favour of the good old times.

"When I was young," said Aunt Pen, emphatically, "it was thought a beauty for a woman's hair to be smooth and glossy and well-cared-for. Girls had not learnt to dress their heads like men, nor was towzled hair considered becoming."

Aunt Pen was looking down at her plate, but none the less did Mrs. Hyde appropriate the observation.

"To be sure! There is great truth in what you say, Miss Hyde; and I often tell my girls they must keep their hair more tidy. I'm sure there's no excuse, with a maid always at their disposal! But *some* people admire natural curls." Mrs. Hyde glanced at Sir Kenneth; but if the remark was intended to extract a compliment it failed in its effect, and nothing more was said—in public, at all events. When Lou and Flossie appeared at tea-time, however, their wavy fringes were smoothed neatly back; and a coil of plaits, tidily arranged, supplanted the curls at the back.

"A great improvement, my dears!" was their mother's gratified comment. "I hope your aunt agrees with me. You won't part with *your* curls I see, Mona?"

"No, aunt; Jack likes them, and Jack comes first," Mona answered gently.

Mrs. Hyde shrugged her shoulders and murmured—though not loud enough for Mona to hear—"What a wilful little piece of vanity it is!"

"I am so glad you have not given up your curls," said Sir Kenneth aside to Mona, later in the evening; "they are so becoming."

"Oh, I don't care about that! I only stick to my curls because Jack likes them so much."

"And so do I."

"That's lucky; for even if you did not, I'm afraid you would have to put up with them because of Jack," Mona answered coolly.

"Jack! always Jack!" exclaimed Sir Kenneth moodily, his sunny face clouding for an instant. "I think Jack is a person to be envied."

While Sir Kenneth walked home under the stars, his thoughts full of Jack's wilful little sister, Aunt Pen, overtaking Mona as she lingered in the gallery on her way to her room, laid her hand laughingly upon the girl's dark head.

"Good-night, little Mona! It is well for you that you are not at Aunt Hyde's disposal. She would have this curly head shaved altogether if I only expressed the wish."

IV.

THE longed-for Thursday fixed for the visit to Falconscliffe dawned at last, and besides its blissful anticipations, brought Mona a letter from Jack. These careless, hastily-scrawled missives were the joy of his young sister's heart, and the arrival of one would make her happy for days.

"Does Jack say when he is coming? Will he be in time for our dance on the 10th?" asked Mrs. Hyde, smiling graciously upon Jack's sister, already absorbed in her letter.

Mona hastily ran through the pages and her face fell.

"He never mentions it. I'm afraid it won't be so soon as that, though; for he says that he is lionising some American friends through Paris. How I hate them for keeping Jack away from me!"

Mrs. Hyde in her heart echoed the sentiment. It was too annoying to think of Jack Tracy, the future Lord Portpatrick, exposed to all sorts of dangers from worldly mothers—a class Mrs. Hyde detested—upon the other side of the Channel, while Lou and Flossie were wasting their attractions on the detrimentals of the neighbourhood—undergraduates home for vacation, penniless curates and ineligible subs. from the *Borderers*. To be sure, there was now Sir Kenneth. Lady Falconer would have an unexceptionable position in the county; and a pleasing castle arose in the air at the bidding of Mrs. Hyde's fertile imagination.

Her trump-card was a grand ball, fixed for the end of the following week, for which she had already issued invitations. It was to witness both Lou and Flossie's formal introduction to society, and at the same time astonish the county with the splendour of Carolside hospitality under the new régime. But much might also be done in the visit to Falconscliffe, about which Sir Kenneth had seemed so eager. As luck would have it, too, her girls would have the field to themselves; for the morning dawned cloudy and cold: Aunt Pen had twinges of rheumatism, and asked Mrs. Hyde to make her excuses to Sir Kenneth, as she dared not face the bleak moorland winds. The party without her could all be accommodated in the barouche—all but Mona, that is; and needless to say, such an insignificant item was not worth considering. Nevertheless, Mrs. Hyde made a point of explaining to Aunt Pen the necessity for leaving Mona at home, with many laments that the child should lose her pleasure.

"However, Miss Hyde, these disappointments *will* happen, and Mona must just learn to bear them better. As I tell her, she can't expect all the indulgences of grown-up girls; but, between ourselves, I'm afraid she is getting a little spoilt, what with your kindness and what with my own."

A shade had overspread Aunt Pen's face while her hostess was speaking, and at the end she said coldly: "I am sorry to have put all the plans out of joint in this way. Can nothing be managed?"

"Nothing, I fear," answered Mrs. Hyde with some stiffness. "Being a first visit, I must take Mr. Hyde with me, and Sir Kenneth made such a point of both my girls going."

"In that case there is no more to be said," Aunt Pen rejoined, as though dismissing the subject.

Mrs. Hyde turned at the door to express a parting hope that her visitor would make herself quite at home in her absence, and order anything and everything she wished. "And please don't trouble about Mona, dear Miss Hyde. I've given her some work to do—some books her uncle wants arranged and catalogued. Girls are all the better for being busy, and she won't have time to fret."

Would she not? Tender-hearted Aunt Pen did not feel so sure of that as she sat in her own room watching the party drive off, and thinking of Mona's wistful face. "Little puss! she finds her way to one's heart somehow!" she thought to herself as she took up her knitting and listened for Mona's step on the stair, which had come to be such a familiar sound. But to-day all was silent.

As the morning wore away the clouds dispersed, the wind dropped, and, after one or two struggles, the sun shone out brightly.

"Griffiths!" called Aunt Pen, presently, "go and find Miss Mona at once and bring her here to me. I don't know where she is. Look everywhere."

Griffiths *did* look everywhere, and at last found a tear-stained, dust-begrimed Mona in the library among the books. She had just

finished her catalogue, but, conscious of her unpresentable appearance, would fain have stayed where she was. Griffiths, however, would take no denial, and faithfully ushered Mona to the threshold of Miss Hyde's room.

Mona, standing just within the doorway, as much in shadow as possible, with drooping head and downcast eyes, asked meekly: "Did you want me, Aunt Pen?"

"Yes, my dear. What have you been doing all this time?" regarding her niece attentively through her gold-rimmed eye-glasses.

"Arranging books and making a list of them for uncle. I'm afraid I'm untidy, but Griffiths wouldn't wait."

"Have you been doing nothing else?" going up to Mona and laying a kind hand upon her shoulder. "Ah! just as I thought! Crying your eyes out."

Mona knew Aunt Pen better now and was sure of her sympathy.

"Oh, aunt! I did so want to see Falconscliffe! And I'm quite sure Sir Kenneth meant me to go, for he asked me first of all. It wasn't just out of politeness to her, as Aunt Hyde said. But I know I'm very silly to mind so much."

"*Very*. Life is full of disappointments, child. We must learn to put up with them, for 'what can't be cured must be endured,' and endured with a good grace, too. There!" (with a kiss) "I'm not so *very* angry with you. The sun is shining and my rheumatism is better, and I'm going to drive directly after luncheon and mean to take you with me. Make yourself smart, for perhaps we may look in at Falconscliffe and see what they are doing."

And so it happened that just as Sir Kenneth's guests had finished luncheon and he was preparing with rather a bored face to do the honours of Falconscliffe, there came a roll of wheels in the courtyard and a peremptory clang of the bell, followed by the entrance of Aunt Pen leaning on Mona's arm. That naïve little person knew not how to dissemble, and her face was radiant as Sir Kenneth's own as he sprang forward to greet them.

"The sun came out and so did I," Aunt Pen explained bluntly. "Being a woman, I knew, Sir Kenneth, you would allow me a woman's privilege of changing my mind. Thanks; we lunched before we started, but we are both very curious to see this grim old home of yours."

"Yes, do let us begin to explore!" Lou cried eagerly. "Mona, you have no idea what a jolly old place this is—quite too delicious for anything! I should awfully like to live here!"

"Dear Lou is so transparent!" murmured Lou's mother aside to Aunt Pen.

The little old lady turned upon her an uncomprehending stare. "Do you think so? To me at times Lou is quite unintelligible. Mr. Hyde, will you give me your arm? I can't do without a prop to-day. Sir Kenneth had better lead the way with the young people."

The young people, nothing loth, trooped off, and soon the old roof-tree was ringing with their merry laughter. The elders followed more slowly through the living-rooms on the ground-floor, occupied by Sir Kenneth—oak-panelled these, and modern only by comparison—to the low-browed stone archway leading to the older part of the building. Sir Kenneth and the cousins had already ascended the old stairway, worn by the feet of many generations, to the second tier, where the panting elders came up with them in a stately apartment, vaulted and arched with stone, which had once served as banqueting-room to Falconers long deceased.

"I prefer the snuggery downstairs," Sir Kenneth was explaining, "but this is the banqueting-hall proper, where my forefathers did their entertaining."

"I like this best," said Mona eagerly; "and what lovely windows!"

The windows, blazoned with coats-of-arms and quaint and curious devices, were of fair size, and looked seaward; the ground on this side was of higher level, and not far below the deep window-embrasures.

"Is this your crest, Sir Kenneth; this queer bird with the ribbons hanging to its feet?" Lou asked curiously. "There it is again, carved in stone over the fireplace."

Sir Kenneth smiled. "Yes, that is the falcon which laid the foundations of the family fortunes. Tradition has it that for loyal service done (something in the fighting way, you may be sure), one of the chase-loving Norman Kings granted my lucky ancestor as much land as a falcon, flying from his wrist, should measure out before he perched. The gallant bird did his best, no doubt, for from that time forth his descendants, in grateful remembrance, have borne as their cognisance 'a falcon rising, jessed and belled.' You see the device repeated again in the windows here."

Aunt Pen glanced at Mona's kindling face, seeing, perhaps, girlish enthusiasms of her own reviving again in her bright-eyed niece. "A pretty legend, Sir Kenneth," was the old lady's comment. "But no falcon won you all this?" and she waved towards the wide tract of heather and moorland stretching to the woods of Carolside.

"Oh, no! we did the rest ourselves," confessed Sir Kenneth, gaily. "And as for Carolside, a bold ancestor of mine—one, Sir Roger—carried off its heiress, and kept her in durance vile until she agreed to marry him and endow him with her fair estates. Come this way, and I will show you the place of her captivity."

He led them to an upper story, where they found in one of the octagonal turrets a small room with one window looking out over the wild waves. "Here it is—the Ladye Bertha's room, they call it. The loudest cries for help would go unheeded here, you may be sure, and no signal of distress would avail much from such an outlook."

"And pray what was the King about to let such things go on?" asked Mrs. Hyde, indignantly.

"He was wily enough to wink at such peccadilloes in a loyal subject," laughed her husband. "And I daresay Sir Roger remembered his complaisance when the time came for a loan of money or men."

"Did the lady hold out long?" questioned Mona, who was thinking sympathetically of the poor captive in her lonely eyrie.

"Oh, no! the tale goes that she soon forgave her suitor the rough manner of his wooing, and made him, in every sense of the word, a valuable wife. 'Fortune favours the brave,' you know. Perhaps it was about that time we first adopted the motto."

"It was an appropriate one, no doubt," said Mr. Hyde. "The bold and successful raids of the wild Falconers are notorious in all the country round. In those days I shouldn't have cared for a Falconer as neighbour, to pounce upon all I held most precious."

"Never mind, Mr. Hyde," Sir Kenneth said, smiling; "you see before you a refreshing instance of poetical justice. My ancestors in the old days began by pillaging other people, and ended by pillaging themselves. And now" (with a sigh) "this old tower, the cradle of our race, has come to be the only dwelling-place their descendant can afford to inhabit. Miss Mona, there are still some steps between us and the battlements; you undertook to climb to the top."

"But *I* did not," broke in Aunt Pen; "and with your permission, Sir Kenneth, Mrs. Hyde and I will just sit here and wait till you come down again."

And perching herself upon a seat in the deep-recessed window, as the captive heiress perhaps did long ago, Aunt Pen nodded the young people a peremptory dismissal, while Mrs. Hyde, nothing loth, sank into a chair beside her. Her husband elected for the climb, and followed the others, the eager host piloting the way with Mona beside him.

The sound of their steps and voices grew fainter in the distance, and Mrs. Hyde and Aunt Pen were left to entertain each other.

"He is expiating his forefathers' faults rather dearly, poor fellow," Aunt Pen said musingly, following out her own thoughts, oblivious of her uncongenial companion; "but it's a plucky thing to do, and I like him for it."

"*I* like him too, *immensely*," assented Mrs. Hyde with all the fervour of a would-be mother-in-law; "and I am glad to see that Mr. Hyde has taken quite a fancy to him and treats him like—like a son, in fact; so we are all of one mind," with a well-pleased giggle. "I'm so pleased to find Sir Kenneth is disengaged for our dance on the 10th. He has promised to come early. I sometimes think, dear Miss Hyde, that he is nowhere so happy as at Carolside among us all"—with a tentative glance at Aunt Pen sitting engrossed in her own thoughts.

"Are you expecting a large party?" she asked, ignoring the insinuation.

"Yes, indeed; half the county. We are so glad to be able to manage it during your visit, for I should like you to see my girls' first appearance."

"What are they going to wear on the occasion?" asked Aunt Pen abruptly. "In my time a first ball-dress was a matter of some importance."

Mrs. Hyde was delighted that Aunt Pen should interest herself in the subject. "White; both white. I like nothing so well for young girls. The most charming dresses, ordered at Madame Bing's, the first dressmaker in Burbeck; for Mr. Hyde insists on my sparing no expense. Madame Bing has exquisite taste, and she tells me the style she recommends will become both Flossie and Lou admirably."

"And Mona?"

"Mona! Ah, that's just it! The poor child has absolutely nothing suitable. Young men are so thoughtless about such things. She brought nothing but just a school wardrobe, and so careless with her clothes as she is! After two months you can imagine its condition."

Aunt Pen nodded gravely.

"So it's impossible for her to appear at the dance, as Mona and I decided this morning. It's a disappointment for the child, of course, but I've told her she may find a quiet corner in the gallery, out of sight, and see the fun from there."

"H'm. It seems a pity she should lose her pleasure for such a trifle."

"So it does. My girls are so good-natured that they would be only too glad to lend her anything if it would fit, but Mona is such a mite of a creature compared with them. And I'm sure, dear Miss Hyde, you'll agree with me that it's only befitting Mr. Hyde's position that Mona should appear properly dressed, or not at all."

To this Aunt Pen cordially agreed, and with a sigh of relief Mrs. Hyde felt that she had disposed of a difficulty.

V.

It was the day of the ball at Carolside. Lou and Flossie were contemplating with satisfaction the dresses lately arrived from Madame Bing, when Mona came running with a summons from Aunt Pen to go to her room at once.

"I believe Aunt Pen has something to show us, for I'm to go, too," said Mona, eagerly linking her arm in Lou's, as all three hurried along the corridor. She thought she had guessed rightly when Aunt Pen produced two morocco cases, which she handed to the Hyde sisters.

"A little present for you each to wear this evening," she said, kindly. "I hope you will like them."

In each case lay a handsome gold bracelet, every link set with pearls and rubies.

"Oh, aunt! How awf— how supremely beautiful!" cried Flossie in raptures, floundering among the polysyllables she thought Aunt Pen would prefer.

"Thanks so much, they're really quite too fetching—I mean— lovely," corroborated Lou, equally at a loss for words when deprived of her own language.

Mona was in ecstasies of admiration. Aunt Pen smiled at her raptures.

"And what about Mona?" she said presently.

"Ah, yes—Mona!" echoed Lou, always good-natured, and wishing that her cousin might share her good fortune.

"She must not be forgotten; only it seems she will not be at the dance?"

"No. I have no dress," said Mona, slowly; "but Dick and I are to look on from the gallery," she added cheerfully, for she was trying to put in practice Aunt Pen's advice to endure what could not be cured.

"Is dress the only obstacle? How would this do?" asked Aunt Pen.

She lifted the trunk of a box standing near, showing a mass of frothy white, interspersed with gleams of satin.

"Take it out, Flossie; Madame Bing promised to do her best, so I hope it will fit. Griffiths took her one of Mona's frocks as a pattern."

Mona gave one glance at the dress, and then, rather to the sisters' dismay, flew into her aunt's arms, and gave her a hug which tried to comprise the whole breadth and depth of her gratitude. Her present delight was the gauge of her former disappointment. Her cousins' satisfaction, too, was hearty and unfeigned, and both girls thanked Miss Hyde as warmly as though the gift had been to themselves.

"It will be ever so much jolli— more enjoyable now," said Flossie demurely. "And mamma will be so pleased." Aunt Pen, for her part, did not feel so sure of that, but was wisely silent.

"The presents shall be a surprise for her," she said. "Do not show them until you all go down dressed for the evening." The suggestion was voted excellent and adopted without hesitation, as the girls carried their presents away and bestowed them in secret. The happiness of the Hyde sisters was made complete an hour or two later, when a lovely bouquet of lilies and stephanotis and another of roses were carried to their rooms, having been left by a soldier-servant from Burbeck Barracks.

Dusk came at last, and at the earliest possible moment Mona, with beating heart, began to array herself. It had not occurred to her as even possible that she should ever possess a dress of such fairy-like fabric, and she scarcely recognised her own little person in

the long cheval glass. Snatching up the long white gloves which completed the gift, she flew off to Aunt Pen's room to thank her just once more. Miss Hyde put on her eye-glasses to inspect and admire—criticism was out of the question—while Griffiths, with an anxious face, put a few finishing touches.

"I think it wants this to make it complete," said Aunt Pen; and opening her dressing-case she took out a single string of pearls, which she clasped round Mona's throat. Mona, whose sole possession in the way of ornaments was a coral necklet of her mother's, was too ignorant to understand the worth of the rare old pearls, but she valued the kind thought of the giver, and her eyes were dewy as she turned to thank Aunt Pen with a kiss.

"It is like a dream!" she said; "a long, beautiful dream. Oh, Aunt Pen, do pinch me just to prove I am awake. How surprised Aunt Hyde will be! and—and Sir Kenneth!" Then a lovely blush mantled her cheeks, and her eyes grew dreamy. She said no more, but while Griffiths adjusted her ribbons her thoughts were busy wondering "Would he have missed me?—Will he ask me to dance?" Then, with a sudden humility, "Oh, how foolish to suppose he can think of me at all in such a roomful of people!"

The reception-rooms were brilliant with lights when Aunt Pen and Mona descended to the great drawing-room, just in time to find Lou and Flossie displaying their gifts.

The torch-bearing gods and goddesses upon the walls flung down the soft gleam of scores of wax candles upon the girls' pretty lace dresses, set off by the brilliant bouquets. Their mother looked as radiant as themselves as she admired the bracelets: here, at last, was a substantial earnest of Aunt Pen's goodwill.

"And here is another surprise, mamma!" cried Lou gleefully, drawing her cousin forward. "Doesn't she look pretty? and it's all Aunt Pen's doing!"

Yes; it *was* all Aunt Pen's doing, and Mrs. Hyde's complacent feelings towards her guest experienced a sudden change. It was just like the meddlesome old tabby to be always thrusting Mona forward. Why couldn't she let well alone? Mrs. Hyde was a good-natured woman. When once Sir Kenneth was safely secured as a son-in-law, and the Portpatrick coronet within her grasp, she was ready to plot and scheme for the little orphan cousin; but till these were well assured, every triumph of Mona's was gall and wormwood to Mona's hostess. She could have shaken the insignificant Cinderella transformed into a princess and the fairy godmother who had dared to work the change. It was too aggravating to see the little old lady erect and dignified in her black brocade watching, with satisfaction gleaming in her blue eyes, as Mona floated by with—yes—with the prince of the evening, Sir Kenneth himself!

For, oh bliss! oh rapture! he had espied her at once as she stood half-shyly in the corner by Aunt Pen's chair watching the

arrivals; he had rushed up with eager greetings, and though the first dance was dedicated to the eldest daughter of the house, Mona's doubts were soon put to rest, for in a moment her pink and gold programme was scribbled all over with bold K. Fs. After that she did not care much what happened. All the nice men she knew among her uncle's friends were asking her to dance, and here was good-natured Lou bringing others to introduce to her. Mona put down the names impartially, smiling upon her partners in her sunny way, but scarcely individualising them. She only knew they filled up the gaps between her K. Fs. The features of the evening were the dances with Sir Kenneth, and the spaces between them the Olympiads by which she reckoned time.

"Is your brother here to-night? Mrs. Hyde seemed rather to expect him," asked Sir Kenneth of Mona in one of the pauses of their dance.

"No; if he were it would be just perfect," she answered, reminded of this one flaw in her sphere of happiness. "But he may be here any day now, and when he comes we are going to keep house together."

"And leave Carolside? I shall owe your brother a grudge if he takes you away from us."

"Oh, no! I mean you and Jack to be the greatest friends. You must come and see him directly he arrives."

"I shall be most happy to make Mr. Jack Hyde's acquaintance," began Sir Kenneth rather stiffly.

"Not Hyde—*Tracy*," corrected Mona. "Jack is really only my step-brother."

"Tracy! is that your brother's name? And is he still in Paris?"

"Yes. Why do you ask?"

"Oh! only because a friend of mine, attached to the Embassy in Paris, is to be best man next week to a fellow named Tracy, who is going to marry a rich American. But his man's heir to a peerage, for they say the prospective coronet tempted the lady."

"So is Jack. At least he will be Earl of Portpatrick some day, unless his great-uncle marries, and he's ever so old already—ninety, or a hundred, I fancy. Although, of course, it can't be the same Tracy."

"Of course not," said Sir Kenneth hastily, and he quickly changed the subject. After all, what were other people's concerns to these two, who had a hundred things nearer home to interest them.

"Aren't Flossie's lilies lovely, Sir Kenneth?" exclaimed Mona, enthusiastically, as her cousin, upon the arm of her adjutant, passed the nook in the conservatory where she and her partner were resting after the *Distant Shore*. "Flossie always looks well when she is enjoying herself. And Lou's flowers are almost as beautiful. We guessed at once where they came from."

"And you have none! Just because you said so positively you wouldn't be here."

"Oh! I shouldn't have had any either way."

"How do you know that? As it happens, yours would have been larger and finer than any here. And now I have nothing to offer you but this."

He took a blush rosebud, fringed with maidenhair, from his buttonhole, and held it towards Mona. "It is not like your cousins' flowers; but even a little rosebud can be eloquent sometimes, and this shall speak for me. Will you take it?"

She fastened the spray in her dress, blushing prettily as she met his eyes, so tender and so trustworthy. The presence of that little nestling rosebud made Mona feel unaccountably happier all the evening. There seemed not a cloud just now in all her radiant sky. Again and again she went back to Aunt Pen's corner just to tell her that everything was more beautiful and wonderful than she had ever dreamed possible, and to whisper gratefully: "It's all your doing, Aunt Pen!"

And the old lady would smile, well pleased, and then with a half-sigh wonder if the world would always seem as bright and beautiful to the blithe damsel.

The inmates of Carolside slept late next morning, and breakfast was served to everyone in his or her own room. Flossie had dreamed sweetly of her adjutant until the morning was well on, and neither she nor Lou thought it necessary to hasten their toilet.

Mona, for her part, was too full of excitement to sleep late, and it was not very long after her usual hour when she flung open her window to the morning air, fresh with the heather-scented breath of the moors. But she loitered over dressing, going over and over again in memory the blissful hours of yestere'en; and it was not far short of eleven o'clock when she took a carefully-preserved, but rather drooping rosebud from the glass of water on her dressing-table, and fastened it with tender touch at the throat of her dress. Then with leisurely steps she went downstairs, and passed out through an open window on to the verandah skirting the whole south side of the house. From a corner near the oriel window of the library, you could catch a glimpse of Falconscliffe Tower; and here Mona paused and leaned against the pillar of the creeper-covered balustrade, while her thoughts flew with a blush from the Tower to its master.

A bare quarter-of-an-hour earlier, Mrs. Hyde had joined her husband in the library, where he was languidly looking through the *Times* and in his secret heart agreeing with the Poet that "one of the pleasures of having a rout is the pleasure of having it over." His wife threw herself yawning into a large leathern chair, back to the window, and stretched out her hand for the pile of letters awaiting her upon

the table. Apologies, most of them, for non-appearance the previous evening, not so engrossing but that she presently heard her husband's sudden exclamation as he turned his *Times*.

"My dear! Here is news for you!—'The Earl of Portpatrick is lying dangerously ill at his Irish seat, Ballyrag Castle. The aged nobleman, who is unmarried, is in his 97th year.' This will bring Tracy home in double-quick time."

"Of course it will! How fortunate!" An amiable smile of maternal solicitude mingled with satisfaction overspread Mrs. Hyde's complacent features, as she mentally gazed into a sunny future free from the cares of chaperonage. "Dear little Mona," she mused, starting off in a train of thought at a pace which soon distanced her husband, who, being of slow perceptions, found himself, as it were, like a traveller left behind on the platform.

"How much I have enjoyed the dear child's visit! Mr. Hyde, we must ask her brother to join her here as soon as possible, and make his home at Carolside just as long as he likes—until, indeed," with a sigh, "he goes to settle down at Ballyrag Castle, for of course it will come to that.—And here I declare is a letter with the Tracy crest, in Jack's handwriting! No doubt announcing his return!"

She pounced upon it eagerly:

"DEAR MRS. HYDE,—I take an early opportunity of acquainting you with some news closely concerning my happiness, in which after your great kindness to Mona and myself I feel sure you will take an interest. I hope hereafter to have an opportunity of proving my gratitude" (Mrs. Hyde read on, smiling to herself), "but for the present the preparations for my approaching marriage—so hastily arranged—and for my visit to Florida with my bride, who is imperatively ordered back at once to her native climate, occupy me so completely that ——"

Mr. Hyde, who had returned to his newspaper, was suddenly startled by a horrified exclamation from his wife, whose smiles had vanished and who was mingling with the phrases of the letter a lava-torrent of anger, indignation and annoyance in such confused vehemence of ejaculation that it was some minutes before poor Mr. Hyde could even gather the reason for the eruption.

Alas! for poor Mona, lingering on the verandah outside, so absorbed in her bright day-dreams that she never heeded the murmur of voices which came to her in buzzing monotone through the open library window, until one of them was raised suddenly, first to excitement, then to anger; and a name caught her ear, uttered in hard, rasping tones, she recognised.

The irate tones of Mrs. Hyde's voice could not fail to reach other ears than those for which they were intended, and so the barbed arrows of her wrath found their way not only to poor Mona on the verandah, but also to another unintentional listener in the ante-room upon the

other side of the curtain ; a little old lady this, whose blue eyes were flashing fiercely as she paused near the window, leaning on her ebony stick. Aunt Pen, too, had received a letter of importance that morning : a summons from her steward which would necessitate her immediate return to Redruthyn, and she was making her way to the library intending to announce this change of plans to her hostess when the sound of excited voices attracted her attention. She only arrived in time to hear the conclusion of Jack's letter, and to realise with a flash of reflected pain the blow it was inflicting on the poor little hearer outside.

"I am afraid little Mona will take my marriage very much to heart," Mrs. Hyde read on with hard voice and angry eyes ; "all the more as it must be so long before we can have her with us. Please break the news gently to my dear little sister. I don't know what is to become of her meantime ; the poor child won't like the idea of returning to school, and yet, what else can be done ?"

Mrs. Hyde crushed the paper angrily together. "Break it gently indeed ! I shall do no such thing ! I've had trouble enough with that child already, though her ungrateful brother throws her over and makes a fool of himself without a second thought."

The soft breeze stirred the leaves of the creeper fringing the balustrade, which was rustling an accompaniment to Mrs. Hyde's denunciations ; but now another faint sound became audible in the verandah : the sound of a hushed footstep, the swish of a dress. The window near which Aunt Pen stood was darkened for an instant by some swiftly-moving object, as an indistinguishable figure flitted swiftly towards a shallow flight of steps close by leading direct to the shrubberies. A moment later Aunt Pen caught sight of a blue skirt disappearing among the evergreens.

Her heart went wistfully after the fugitive fluttering painfully out of sight, like a summer insect maimed and hurt by some careless hand. She was making up her mind to follow, when Mrs. Hyde's voice again surged into hearing, in answer to some remonstrance of her husband's.

"Jack Tracy expects that I shall keep her here ? Then I can tell you that he has reckoned without his host ! Back to school she shall go at once. I'll write to Fraulein Hirsch this very day."

"My dear," remonstrated her husband, "surely for appearance' sake we had better ——"

"Mr. Hyde !" turning upon him with a majestic anger which ought to have annihilated him upon the spot, "do you seriously ask me, a woman and a mother, to keep that chit here, a continual spoil-sport to ruin our girls' chances ? Are you so blind as not to see that already Sir Kenneth is beginning to be taken with her pretty face and insinuating ways ? to say nothing of the way in which she wheedles Aunt Pen ! But perhaps you consider yourself better able

than *I* am to think of the dear girls' welfare? Perhaps I had better leave things to *you*, as you're so wise and clever and so well able to provide for them!"

This last threat brought Mr. Hyde to his knees, as it were.

"My dear!" he began mildly. "I only ——"

"If you would only hold your tongue and not interfere, that's all I ask of *you*, Mr. Hyde. Now you'd better find Mona and send her here to me. The sooner she hears of her idiotic brother's behaviour, and things are put on their proper footing, the better for us all. Meantime, I'll write and tell Fraulein to expect her next week."

"You can spare yourself the pains, Mrs. Hyde," said a quiet, clear voice, as the *portière* was pushed aside, and there appeared in the space the spare little person of Aunt Pen. "I am obliged to go back to Redruthyn to-morrow, and when I leave, Mona goes with me to her father's old home, which—please Heaven!—will be hers now till she leaves it of her own free will. She is going to be the child of my old age—a daughter to me while I live, and (I may as well tell you now) my heiress when I die. Your children will get a thousand pounds apiece, neither more nor less—the rest will go to their cousin, my dear nephew Philip's child. You need not trouble to speak to Mona on the subject. She was on the verandah, and heard her brother's letter from beginning to end. Let her grieve over it in peace. I don't think there is anything more, except" (with a malicious twinkle of her bright blue eyes) "that I must thank you for your unintentional kindness to my *adopted daughter*. (Mona, I'm sure, is very grateful to you, for *she* has no idea that it was not disinterested.) Also for your own and your good husband's hospitality to myself. There's an end to business! Now I must go and comfort Mona—if I can!"

While the kind little old lady hastily donned her walking things and trotted through gardens and shrubberies looking for Mona, the poor child, wandering with uncertain feet among the familiar paths, heedless where she went, only longing to escape into solitude, happed upon a little rustic summer-house, standing solitary among the pine woods, which seemed to offer a safe hiding-place. Its lattice windows were darkened with a tangle of creeper, its very steps were moss-grown. Mona lifted the rusty latch, and entering, threw herself upon a rustic bench and covered her face with her hands.

It was strange that in all her anticipations of the future the possibility of Jack's marrying had never presented itself to his little half-sister. The calamity which dispersed all her pleasant dreams had come so suddenly and demolished at one fell blow the airy castles so many months a-building. Jack had deserted her—Jack, who was all her world. Ah! rightly, indeed, was she named *Mona*—solitary—alone in her misery and sorrow, thought the desolate child as she crouched upon the dusty bench. Her pretty curls were all rumpled; no one would have recognised the blithe blue butterfly

in this woe-begone damsel, face to face with the first sorrow of her life.

A passer-by paused in astonishment before the half-open door. The sound of wild sobs coming from a place always dedicated to silence gave him quite an eerie sort of feeling. Was it the unquiet spirit of some departed Falconer bemoaning its former crimes? or vanished loves?

No; there was something too mortal and material about the sounds for such a supposition. It must be some human creature in trouble, and although an important errand to Mr. Hyde was taking him in eager haste by a seldom-used short cut from Falconscliffe to Carolside, Sir Kenneth, being a kind-hearted man, turned aside to inquire into the matter. As he recognised the familiar blue skirt and divined who was the wearer thereof, he felt that his philanthropy was rewarded. In a moment he was upon his knees upon the dusty floor, trying to withdraw the hands which concealed her face.

"Mona!" he cried; "my dear little Mona! Tell me what is the matter. I cannot bear to see you cry!"

Mona was past caring to conceal her grief. She could only turn aside her tear-stained face and try to free her hands, which Sir Kenneth was holding fast.

"No; don't turn away from me, Mona! Who has more right to know your troubles and cares than I?—I, who love you! There, it has come out! I meant to keep it to myself till I had your uncle's permission to speak, but now your tears have forced the secret from me. Mona! Give me the right to comfort you. Show you care for me by trusting me with your trouble. Is it anything so *very* terrible?"

As he knelt beside her pleadingly, his face was close to hers, where blushes were beginning to struggle with tears. It seemed only natural for Sir Kenneth to draw the weary little head to rest upon his shoulder, where the poor child managed to stammer out her grief. It did not seem to Sir Kenneth so very serious a one. He gave a relieved little laugh.

"Nothing worse than that, my darling?"

"Jack was all the world to me—until you came," sobbed Mona, with naïve self-betrayal, looking up through her tears into his eager face.

And this was the scene Aunt Pen came upon among the silent pine-woods.

It would have disconcerted many maiden ladies of her age, but not so Aunt Pen. She stepped boldly across the threshold and seemed to take in everything at a glance. Sir Kenneth gently loosed his hold of Mona, and rising, went up to Miss Hyde with more dignity than would have seemed possible under the circumstances.

"Miss Hyde," he said frankly, "I am a poor man; one who hitherto has had more of fortune's buffets than of her rewards. If

your niece were rich in friends and worldly goods, I should not dare to offer her a hand so empty. But if my hand is empty, my heart is full—very full of love for Mona—and she, I think, loves me a little—don't you, Mona?" reaching out his hand to her with a smile.

"Yes, Aunt Pen; I do love him," said Mona simply, putting her hand in his but hiding her face on Aunt Pen's shoulder.

Aunt Pen drew the little creature to her heart with a convulsive pressure; and with a pang the lonely woman realised that this latest treasure must also pass into other keeping and leave her solitary as before.

There was a moment's pause, while she struggled with herself and Sir Kenneth stood by waiting. Then Aunt Pen raised her head and met his wistful eyes.

"So let it be," she said. "You are good and true. Make her happy, as I would have tried to do."

She kissed Mona once, twice, thrice; then rising up—what was an old aunt's love to the child now?—she went away and left the two together.

It had seemed to Mona in the desolation of her first moments of lonely misery that she could never face her relations again. Stricken and wounded to the heart's core, the child dreaded alike her aunt's harshness, her uncle's pity, and her cousins' careless indifference.

But now a wealth of affection and tenderness had poured itself out upon the forlorn little maiden, and, fortified in the conscious strength of that rampart of love, she endured her few remaining hours at Carolside. On the morrow she travelled back with Aunt Pen to Redruthyn. Thither in a week's time Sir Kenneth followed, and together the happy lovers explored the wild Welsh hills and wandered by the brawling mountain-streams, which reminded them of the beck-side at Heatherburn, where they had first met.

Sir Kenneth deserted his own moors that season to shoot over the Redruthyn covers; but nearly two whole years passed, and the heather had time to fade and bloom again, before the child-like little betrothed blossomed into Lady Falconer. So much the pair yielded to their kind old friend's wishes and better judgment; and Mona has never had any reason to regret the lessons of wisdom and patience and self-control learned from Aunt Pen during that peaceful time.

Fortune still favours the brave. She smiles now once more upon the Master of Falconscliffe, thanks to the generous old lady whose goodwill he first won by his pluck in adversity. And one thing is certain: however "many years of happy days befal" them in the future, Sir Kenneth and his wife will always mark with a white stone the day which introduced them to Aunt Pen.

OUR LADY IN THE DRAWING-ROOM.

"GO somewhere south," said the kind old doctor after discussing our state of affairs. "It will be good for your chest; and, as you say, Marion wants a thorough change of scene and thought. Now where will you go?"

I did not know; all places were much the same to me, being all unknown. Dr. Bell ruminated for awhile.

"Have you ever been to Aumouth? No? Why not try that? My sister, Mrs. Paterson, lives just out of the place and could find you lodgings: just the sort of thing she likes. It is a nice mild place. They will tell you snow never lies on the ground, and the bay is like the Bay of Naples, and all the rest of the things they say about all the watering-places. Better go, and see into the truth of the statements."

So to Aumouth we went. Marion had just lost her lover, over a question of pounds and pence, and my chest came in very conveniently as an excuse for getting away from our neighbours. They, dear souls, took a benevolent interest in poor Marion's troubles, and made her feel more or less like a fly under a microscope. There would be no one to take the slightest interest in us at Aumouth.

It was dusk on a January day when we drove up to the door of our lodgings, and being thoroughly tired out with the journey from our own northern town, we sank very thankfully into the arm-chairs waiting for us by the bright fire-side. The landlady, all chatter and pleasantness, took charge of our effects, and presently sent up a hot dinner, perfectly dressed, the sight of which was most welcome to us.

Very drowsy and beautiful was the sound of the sea, and when we parted at an early hour on our way to the sleeping chambers it seemed to me that Marion's gloom was already yielding.

On the morrow we came down rested from our bed-rooms, which looked out to the back of the house, and broke into simultaneous cries of delight as we beheld the scene from the sitting-room window. An unclouded sky smiled down upon the living, glowing waters of the sea, upon the sandy beach and upon the folding hills across the bay. We threw the bow-window open to let in air that seemed to us quite warm and balmy.

Good Mrs. Frewen was satisfied with our enthusiasm; we were quite doing our duty by the beauties of the place thus far.

"Are there many visitors in Aumouth now?" we asked.

"Well, 'tis fairly full, ladies. You see, the barracks always make apartments let more or less well, though we have no season in par-

ticular like other watering-places. The officers have always families or friends or such-like. I am glad to say I have let my drawing-room from to-morrow; only a week since the last lady moved out. Belinda is just putting the rooms straight, ready for the lady and her maid." Belinda was Mrs. Frewen's niece. "And what will you please to have for dinner, ladies?"

Anything would please us in this lovely place. We told Mrs. Frewen so, and she departed still better satisfied with us.

We went out to study the place; in point of fact we almost lived out of doors these first few days, for the wind was out of the east and the sunshine was so bright that it was possible for us to sit for ten minutes together on the beach, or on the esplanade that skirted the bay for at least one mile in bare and undisguised ugliness.

We drove out also, but the country inland did not attract us; January is not the month for admiration of rural scenery. It was better to dawdle by the sea and explore the streets of Aumouth, where time seemed to have stood still for a century. We tried to buy lace of native manufacture, but the price forbade it; we tried to buy a parrot whose accomplishments included a perfect vocabulary of foul language, but the owner asked us fifty pounds. We retreated from that parrot pursued by oaths too terribly articulate, and thankful that it was not ours. We tried to buy a cloth jacket, to hire a sewing-machine and a piano, and, having come to the end of our resources, woke up one morning delighted to find that it was Sunday.

Mrs. Paterson had told us which church to attend, and we attended it. The rustiest of old vergers showed us into a seat and impressed upon us that if we were staying in the place it was our duty to hire sittings forthwith. We said we would see about it on the morrow, and settled ourselves comfortably in the high, narrow box that was ours for this one service.

The church was heated with gas, and was insufferably stuffy; the singing was slow and not of the best; the sermon, preached by the curate, was of so dubious a character as to make Marion gaze at me out of the corner of her eyes, and blush uneasily. I looked at the curate; he might be twenty-five or forty-five, he would look the same at either age, and he delivered his appalling statistics and moralities quite unmoved. I looked at the congregation; half of it tittered, half seemed hardened to the kind of thing. I became aware that in the pew next to us sat the officers from the barracks, who had drooped their heads and were giggling undisguisedly.

"I don't think much of Mrs. Paterson's taste," said Marion, as we wended our way back to our lodgings. "If she finds that style of sermon sufficient to the needs of her soul, her soul must be singularly constituted."

We tried the other church in the evening. The sermon was fifty minutes long, the preacher delivered it in a black gown, and for the

last twenty minutes had no waking auditors save Marion and myself. Then we decided to hire sittings according to Mrs. Paterson's recommendation.

Next day we roused up to a feeling of decided interest in the individuals who surrounded us. Sojourn in a watering-place always arrives at that result, sooner or later; nature's charms only fill our minds for a day or two, however enthusiastic we may be.

A good many of our neighbours were already known to us by sight. There was the stiff old military gentleman who made a regular constitutional on the esplanade, day by day, from that point to this and back again, accompanied by a lady, evidently his daughter. There was the sweet baby with the embroidered cloak and the French nurse; the man with the moustache and the black poodle; the old lady with the curls; and there was our fellow-lodger. Our lady in the drawing-room, Mrs. Frewen always called her, with almost as much reverence as if she had been a Madonna.

She was certainly a sweet-looking creature, young and innocent, if you may judge at all by the countenance; and to see her caress her babe when she encountered it in the nurse's arms was a charming sight.

"Here she comes," said Marion, as we stood by the window. "She has found a friend, too. I declare it is the young officer who laughed so at the sermon on Sunday."

"Old friends, perhaps," I suggested. "How pretty and confiding she looks, and much too young to be the mother of that baby. Do you know, Marion, I am sadly afraid that for all her meek looks our lady is a flirt."

"Oh, hush! You forget the existence of Mr. Cartwright."

"Not I. I was afraid that possibly our lady does. Mrs. Frewen tells me that he is an elderly gentleman; she has seen his photograph and seen the baby taught to kiss it."

"Which proves conclusively that you wrong the Madonna-like mamma."

"Who is now bringing her latest conquest into the house," I continued, as Mrs. Cartwright ran lightly up the steps followed by the officer, and, to my surprise, nodded gaily to us in the window.

"After this I think we will go out and see for that curate to come and spend a day with us," gasped Marion; and we put on our hats and went out, though not with that intent.

We walked out to Mrs. Paterson's, and she having business in the town, walked back with us after luncheon, to be picked up at our lodgings by her husband later on. Mrs. Paterson knew everybody; she told us the names and histories of all those whom we described to her, and stared as much as we did when we encountered our lady and her officer driving out sociably into the country.

Our lady nodded a recognition to us, and her companion raised his hat to Mrs. Paterson.

"Now who is that?" said she, stopping to gaze after the carriage. "I don't know her face."

"She is at Mrs. Frewen's, and her name is Cartwright—Mrs. Cartwright. You know her friend, apparently."

"Oh, yes, I know him well enough; Harry Golding—and a very nice fellow he is. A good, honest sort of boy. I must find out who this is, this young woman that he has picked up. Has she any other friends here, do you know?"

No, we could offer Mrs. Paterson no further enlightenment. We did not even know where Mrs. Cartwright came from, and were not at all sure that Mrs. Frewen did either. Meeting the babe on our way, Mrs. Paterson must needs stop to admire it and begin a skilful cross-examination of the nurse, who, however, seemed too stupid to impart much information. We rather enjoyed our friend's discomfiture; not precisely sympathising with her thirst for knowledge.

She got through her business—the deposit of certain club money in the savings-bank, the purchase of calicoes for village use, and ordering of books from the library, and we sat idling over our tea, when the object of interest returned from her drive. Both occupants of the carriage dismounted at our door, the gentleman paying the driver, as in politeness bound. We heard the lady's pretty protestations.

"Indeed you should not, Captain Golding. It is quite wrong that you should pay when you knew that I was going to drive out quite on my own account, without any idea of your accompanying me. You must let me pay you again. What, you won't? Then I must go by myself next time. You really will not come in? I must say good-bye then, for my darling baby will be crying for me. Good-bye; good-bye!"

Mrs. Paterson watched the parting interview with interest and lost no word or motion of our lady's.

"She is certainly pretty," she said deliberately. "She does not look as if there was much harm in her; but women are deep, my dears; women are deep. At least, some of them are. You and I are all right, of course. I fancy Harry Golding would have been just as well pleased if I had not been sitting in your bow-window when he brought his fair one back. Well, did you have Mr. Blackham or Mr. Philpot on Sunday morning?"

"It was the curate—is that Mr. Philpot? He is not handsome, and his eloquence is at least peculiar;" and we drifted on into discussion of all our Sunday's experience.

For a couple of days we watched our lady's proceedings, the innocent air with which she came and went with her cavalier, and then we met her in the entrance as she was going out. She stopped and spoke with the prettiest and most engaging air.

"Do you know, I have so longed to come and call upon you and bring you my baby to look at! Would you have been offended? Would you be offended if I did come in?"

Of course we should not. Do not all women dote upon babies, and were not we especially lonely? We should be charmed to see her, with or without the babe.

"Then may I come in now for just a little chat? Just ten nice friendly minutes, before I go for my morning's airing? Oh, what a nice room! You have been braver than I, I can see, and have put away some of Mrs. Frewen's choice ornaments. There is a green vase in the drawing-room that would make you shudder!—So you came here for your health? So did I. Mr. Cartwright was quite anxious because I lost my appetite—such nonsense, you know!—and he packed the baby and me off here for a fortnight, to see how it answered. Do I look as if I ailed anything, now?"

"You look charmingly well, and I hope are as well as you look, but it is pleasant to be so thought for and looked after."

"Oh, yes, of course, but it is just a wee bit lonely with only a nurse and a baby—not but what a baby is a great resource; I quite feel that I shall not be so really lonely now that I have spoken to you. Do you know the people next door, the Blackmores?"

"No, we have not heard the name. We have only one real acquaintance in the neighbourhood."

"As badly off as I am! That is the worst of going to a fresh place. Well, the Blackmores are residents—quite nice people—and they give a dance to-night. Not a formal matter—almost an impromptu affair—and they have sent me an invitation. It only came last night, and I have not sent in my answer, but I think, under the circumstances, as they are strangers and my husband is not here, I ought to refuse. What do you think?"

"It is a difficult question. We are strangers, too, you see, and can scarcely judge for you. Besides, we know nothing of the customs of the place."

"Neither do I. Perhaps it is quite the right thing to go to dances in this irregular way. But then, I have no clothes!"

"Ah, that settles everything. Well, never mind," said Marion kindly. "If you do not go you can have the satisfaction of watching the other guests arrive, just as we shall."

"Why, yes! That will be something," she cried with childish gaiety. "That will be very amusing. Now I must run away to order the mutton for my dinner and baby's biscuits; and I may bring baby in to see you sometime?"

"Please do. It will be a great pleasure to us," I said, as the little lady took herself away.

"How artless and childlike she is!" said Marion, watching her as she tripped along the pavement. "Mr. Cartwright really ought not to let her go about by herself; she is so much of a child that he should take better care of her."

"For which she might hardly thank him, perhaps."

Mr. Cartwright must have been easy-going indeed if he had

approved the way in which our lady came back at her dinner-hour accompanied by her gentleman acquaintance, who refused to come in, but waited at the foot of the steps as patiently as he might while she ran up to fetch a photograph; evidently her own, from the way in which he looked at it and deposited it in his waistcoat pocket. Two or three tender remarks passed between them, and then he walked off at a brisk pace.

A brilliant lamp was hung out next door that evening, and we put out our own light that we might the better observe the arrivals. Presently we heard the front door close, a figure wrapped in a warm cloak ran down the steps and across the road, disappearing in the darkness of the esplanade. We caught a vision of a sweet, innocent face, full of girlish glee, under the hood of the cloak.

"She has gone over to watch from the seat just opposite," said Marion. "She can watch from there with more security than we can. Is all the company coming on foot?"

Three or four gentlemen and a lady, enveloped in macintoshes and shod with goloshes, called forth this complaint; but now a succession of low and distant rumbling noises struck on our ears; they grew nearer and nearer, and, to our great amusement, bath-chair after bath-chair arrived and discharged its occupant at the Blackmores' door. We had never seen a lady in a ball-dress boxed up behind the glass of a bath-chair before, and it struck us as being irresistibly ludicrous when we beheld one after another uncased and handed out by her cavalier, equipped in macintosh and goloshes.

The last to arrive was Mrs. Paterson's friend, Harry Golding, who came across from the esplanade, evidently from an interview with our lady.

"Now I should think she will come in," remarked Marion. "It is getting much too wet for her to remain outside. Fancy her getting hold of him again to-night! I must confess that it seems to be coming it almost too strong."

Strains of music now arose from the house next door; we closed our curtains and waltzed round and round the room to the sound of our neighbours' piano and fiddle.

All the next day was spent on making an excursion into the country, for the rain had passed with the night and the morning dawned fair and promising. We saw and heard nothing of Mrs. Cartwright.

Next morning Belinda came to clear our breakfast-table, and we inquired anxiously for Mrs. Frewen.

"Oh, there's nothing amiss with aunt, thank you, ma'am," replied the damsel. "She is upstairs with our lady in the drawing-room. She has had bad news, and has to leave this morning all in a hurry, ma'am, and aunt is helping her."

This was sad indeed; we were full of pity for the poor little creature, and wondered what had befallen her: if, possibly, Mr. Cart-

wright were suddenly ill. We sent a message by Belinda, asking if we could help in any way, and received an answer to the effect that Mrs. Cartwright would come in to see us before she left.

The fly was already at the door when she came in, flushed and flurried, and with tears in her eyes. She closed the door before she began to speak.

"So kind of you to offer to help me, and I am in such trouble! Only to think," and the pretty, troubled face looked up at us touchingly—"only to think that my nurse has died suddenly, of heart disease; such a shock to poor Mr. Cartwright, you know! He is left with my delicate little girl, only two years old, on his hands, and has written for me to go at once. And the mischief is," here she lowered her voice, "I have not the money to pay good Mrs. Frewen. I know she was reckoning on getting my money to-morrow, for she has told me of some bills she meant to pay with it. I had written to Mr. Cartwright for some money, but in his trouble he forgot all that, or perhaps he thought I did not want it now. But the fact is ——"

"Don't cry, dear," said Marion, consolingly. "You must keep bright and brave for your journey, you know."

"But you don't know all my trouble," she said, as she wiped her eyes. "I daresay you have seen me with Captain Golding?"

"We have," I remarked a little drily. Something, I do not know what, seemed to me to be a little crooked.

"It is very wrong of me, of course," she continued, plaintively. "I—I used to know him before I married, and I cared for him more than Mr. Cartwright would like to know of. So when I met him here quite unexpectedly, I could not help feeling a little bit pleased. But, you know, he isn't quite satisfactory; not quite what he used to be in the old days; and by borrowing ten pounds of me, he has put me in the most dreadful straits." She was quite tearful and agitated as she told her story, and now looked up to Marion, confiding and anxious as a child. "You said you would help me; could you, would you, lend me ten pounds to pay Mrs. Frewen and take me up to London? I would send it back in two days at the latest, if you dare trust me."

"Of course we dare, you poor child," my sister answered. "But do let this be a warning to you to be more careful in your actions. As the mother of two children ——"

"I know—I know; you may trust me indeed for the future. How can I thank you enough for your great kindness? You have taken such a weight from my mind! Good-bye, you dear, kind creatures! This is my address. I shall never forget you—never!"

She kissed us both, ran out and had a whispered discourse with Mrs. Frewen. The cabman called to her to hasten; and in a minute or two our lady in the drawing-room had disappeared from our sight for ever.

"I do hope I was not wrong in lending her the money," said

Marion, toying with the card the little creature had left. "It is a very good address; but I suppose people get into debt and forget it, even in Mayfair."

A certain delicacy kept us from discussing the money question with Mrs. Frewen; and when Mrs. Paterson called, we only showed her our lady's card, without relating her history.

The morning's post brought no letter, but then we had never expected that it would. We were just dressed for an outing when our lady's friend came up and rang the door-bell. Seeing him, Marion and I drew back into our room, and waited.

There was a colloquy in the hall, and after a short time Mrs. Frewen flung open our door.

"If you are at liberty, ladies, this gentleman would like to speak to you. I must be seeing about my work."

Her manner was unusual, but so were the circumstances. The gentleman thus thrust upon us bowed, and we did the same.

I took up the parable.

"I suspect that you have come to us for news of Mrs. Cartwright, and I am sorry to say that we have none to give."

"It is rather information than news that I have come to ask for," he replied. "You are her cousins, I think?"

"And indeed I think that we are not!"

"But she told me you were. She said you were rather stiff in the back, and inclined to keep me at arm's length. But, for all that, you could not help being her cousins."

His look of bewilderment was delicious. Marion rippled out peals of quiet laughter. "I do solemnly believe that she has cheated me out of ten pounds," she said at her leisure. "But tell me, did you know her before this winter?"

"Never saw her till the other day. She dropped her handkerchief and I picked it up: that sort of thing has happened to me before; but I never picked up a handkerchief for a prettier little lady."

"And she told us that you were an old lover, who had taken to bad ways since her marriage with Mr. Cartwright; and had borrowed all her money, so as to make it impossible for her to pay the landlady without borrowing ten pounds of us!"

"But," he protested, "she borrowed twenty pounds of me, and I bet you anything that she has not paid the landlady now!"

"She gave me this address," began Marion, meekly.

"And she gave me this address!" cried he, flinging an old envelope down upon the card. The addresses did not correspond.

The loss of ten pounds was a serious matter to us, but for all that Marion and I sank down into our arm-chairs and laughed till we cried. Our visitor dropped on the couch and followed our example.

"Do you think that her name was Cartwright at all?" asked I as soon as I began to recover.

"Do you think that she has cheated Mrs. Frewen, too?" asked she.

"Do you think that it was a real baby that they used to carry out?" asked he.

And then, wretchedly out of pocket as we were, we all laughed over again.

It was too true. Our lady in the drawing-room had beguiled us all. Thirty-five pounds ten and ninepence halfpenny had she gleaned from the three parties chiefly concerned, and minor debts made themselves evident in course of time. She owed three-and-sixpence at one little shop for pickled beetroot.

We never knew if the baby was real, but think it was, because we remember that it certainly squealed.

The Aumouth adventure seemed at one time to be utterly disastrous, but just now we are veering in our estimate. Marion has become Mrs. Captain Golding, and I am spending a very happy Christmas with Mrs. Paterson and a nephew of hers who, oddly enough, rejoices in the name of Cartwright.

BELLS AT CHRISTMASTIDE.

Ring, blesséd bells, re-syllable the story
Dear to all children—we are such to-day;
Tell how the Christ-child changed for gloom His glory,
Came and, most homeless, in a rude crib lay.

Clash out the anguish of Earth's troubled peoples,
Doubt and despair in all the jar be rife;
Meet such a prelude from the sounding steeples—
Long night prevail'd before the Lord of Life.

Then, out of wrong, let right rise clearer, clearer;
Dear silver mouths, your rapture on us rain!
Till to Earth's homes the Heaven of Heavens draw nearer;
All feel the Peace and gracious pause to pain.

Ring on! Ring on! The story by your telling
Wins on the heart, as doth that far first year;
Doubt dies away, again the Child is dwelling,
Dwelling with men to bring the Father near.

John Jervis Beresford, M.A.

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The Argosy

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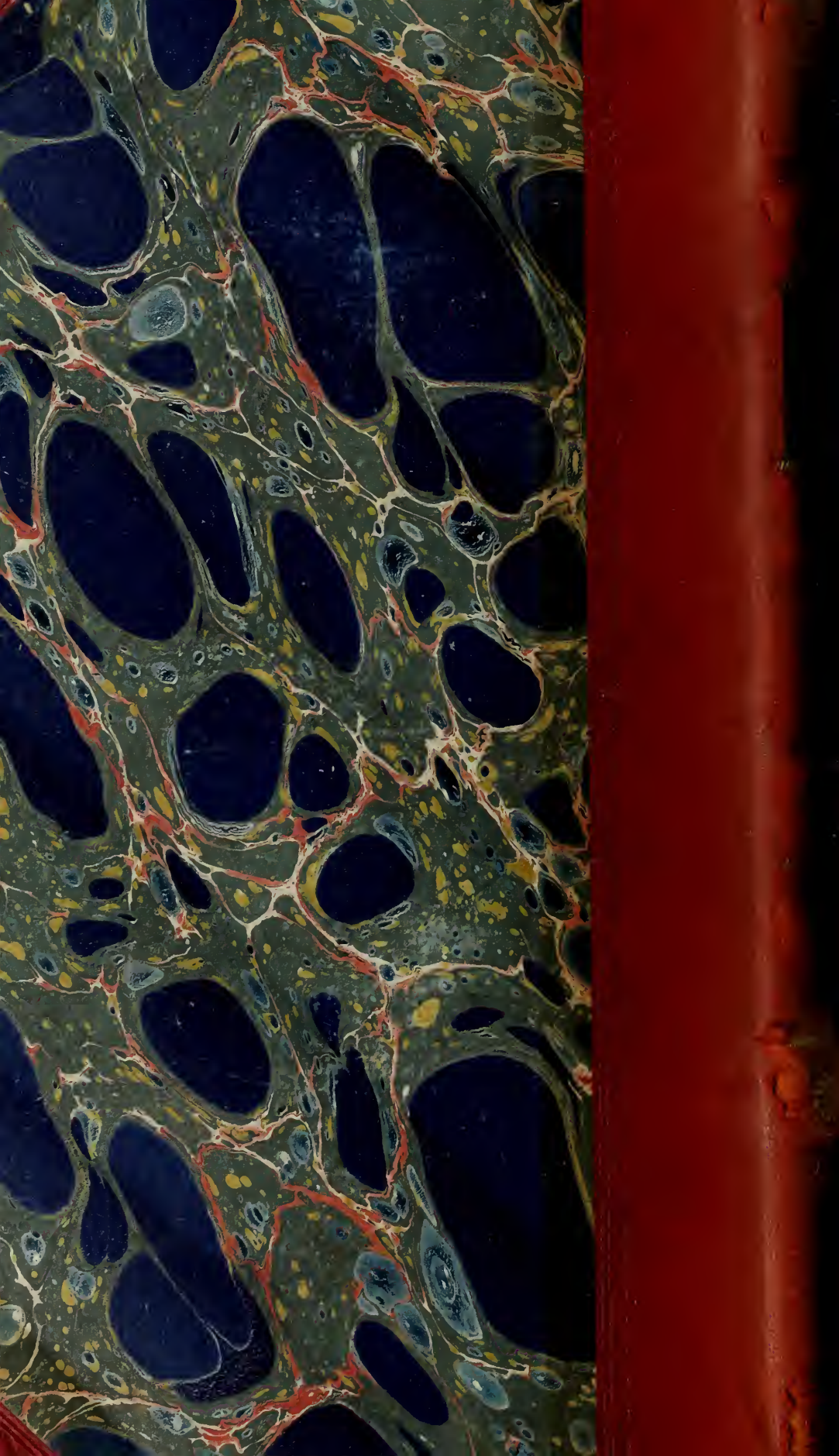
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